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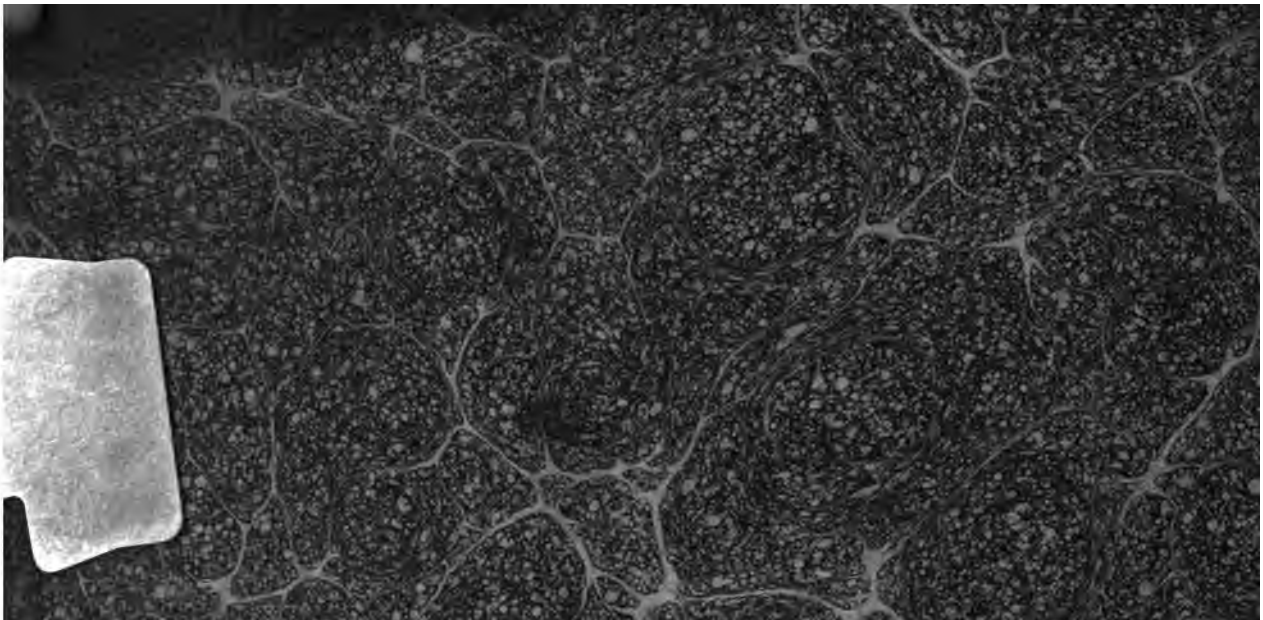

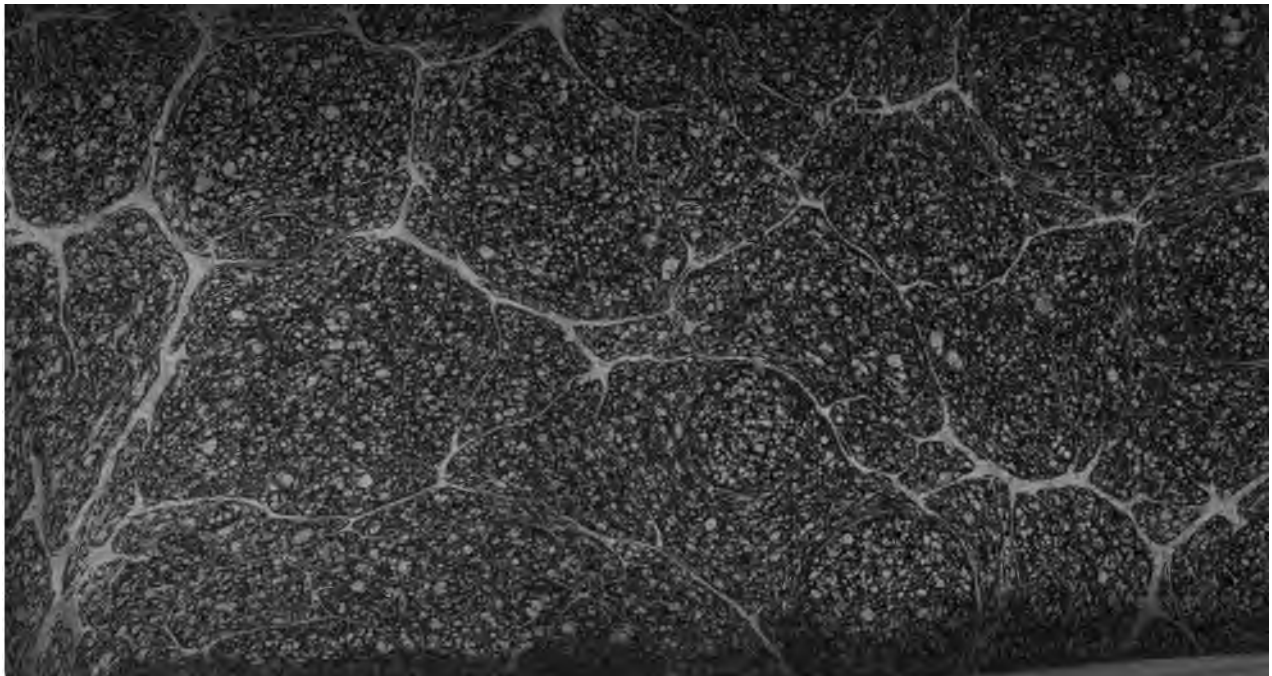

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DONALD MONTEITH.

A NOVEL.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.

DONALD MONTEITH,

THE

HANDSOMEST MAN OF THE AGE

A Novel.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

BY SELINA DAVENPORT,

AUTHOR OF

THE HYPOCRITE, OR THE MODERN JANUS; THE SONS OF THE VISCOUNT AND DAUGHTERS OF THE EARL, &c.

"Here are the pangs of wounded pride,
Of blasted hope, of wither'd joy:
The prop she lean'd on pierc'd her side,
The flame she fed burns to destroy.

In vain does Memory renew
The scenes once ting'd in transport's dye;
The sad reverse soon starts to view,
And turns the past to agony.
Even conscious Virtue cannot cure
The pangs to every feeling due!"

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DONALD MONTEITH.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. Richardson, true to her promise, contrived to draw so animated a picture of Mary to Mrs. Chudleigh, that she gained that lady's consent to bring her with her the next day to dinner—a circumstance which gave Mrs. Richardson such sincere pleasure, that she wrote a few lines to Mary the same evening, and sent them by Sutton, requesting her to be ready at the appointed hour, when she would call for her.

Mary was equally delighted by this intelligence; in a heart like hers, the cha-

racter of Mrs. Chudleigh awakened all its sympathy, and she felt disposed to love her, from the similarity of their misfortunes. Both were mourning in secret over the loss of an adored object; but poor Mrs. Chudleigh had not the same stimulus to exertion as Mary; no pledge of love had blessed the marriage of the former, and the world had now no one charm for her, since the calamities of war had deprived her of her husband: her attachment to his memory, and to every thing connected with it, could not fail of exciting in the bosom of Mary the liveliest interest in the fate of the youthful widow; and she even felt a degree of impatience until the hour arrived at which her new friend stopped her carriage, in order to take her up.

A few minutes conveyed them to the residence of Mrs. Chudleigh, whom they found lying on a couch in the drawing-room, with no other companion than a large spaniel-dog, which had belonged to her husband, and who for that reason was become invaluable to his mistress. She

rose on their entrance. The mourning-dress of Mary, but above all, the tender expression of her intelligent countenance —the heavenly sympathy which beamed from her beautiful eyes, and cast a lustre over each pallid feature, seemed to rivet the attention of the melancholy invalid, who, stretching forth her hand to Mary, invited her to take a seat next her on the couch.

Mary involuntarily raised to her lips the thin feverish hand of Mrs. Chudleigh, who, looking at her with surprise and satisfaction, pressed hers in return, saying—"How much am I indebted to you, Miss Seymour, for this friendly visit to a recluse like myself! I see that my dear cousin Richardson has not raised my expectation too highly." Then turning towards her good-natured relative, she inquired whether she had really resolved to go that day week to Worthing?

Mrs. Richardson replied in the affirmative—"I shall quit Hampstead with less

regret," said she, "now that I have introduced to you my amiable young friend; in her society you will find the hours less tedious; and I shall expect, Maria, to hear soon that you have been prevailed upon to leave, for a time, this favourite residence, for one more suited to the delicacy of your constitution."

Mrs. Chudleigh, forcing a faint smile, thanked her cousin for the anxiety she had always evinced for her removal; "but," added she, sighing deeply as she spoke, "you know that I have resolved never to quit this house for any other; it was *here* that my first dawn of rapture began—it was *here* that it ended—and it is *here* that I mean to draw my last breath."

Tears rushed into the eyes of Mary; they were seen and felt by Mrs. Chudleigh, who was on the point of speaking, when the footman announced that dinner was on table.

During the repast, Mrs. Chudleigh (who scarce tasted of any of the delicacies which were before her) watched, with

minute attention, the highly-interesting guest who sat near her; every turn of the body, every movement of the face, bespoke a mind—a soul of the higher order. "And have I at last," thought she, "discovered a being capable of affording a temporary relief to my breaking heart? If I am so fortunate as to attach this sweet girl to a wretch like myself, my bodily pains will be lightened, and even the incurable ones of my mind will be softened by her tender friendship."

So thought Mrs. Chudleigh: nor was the instantaneous prepossession she felt for Mary at all singular, since never had nature formed a creature more capable of inspiring such sentiments of esteem and affection than Mary Fitzroy. Predisposed to love the amiable victim of conjugal tenderness, Mary no sooner beheld the widowed mourner, than her heart sprang towards her with all the renovated warmth of her romantic disposition; an indescribable feeling seemed to influence her actions, and she immediately formed the generous

resolution of devoting the chief part of her time to assuage the mental anguish of Mrs. Chudleigh, were such a sacrifice wished or requested.

On their return to the drawing-room, Mrs. Chudleigh, who had accepted of the offered arm of Mary, led her to the piano, saying, that the only thing which she found relief from was music. "I sit," said she, "whole days together, and play over those tunes which were most liked by my dear Ernest; but I lose half my pleasure, because I am unable to sing those songs which he used to dwell on with delight; perhaps, Miss Seymour, you will oblige me by accompanying this with your voice."

Mary immediately sat down to the instrument; the music-book was open at the beautiful song of Dibdin, which begins—

"Adieu, adieu, my only life,
My honour calls me from thee;
Remember thou'rt a soldier's wife;
Those tears but ill become thee."

"That, if you please," said Mrs. Chud-

leigh, in a faltering tone, and drawing her chair close by the side of Mary; "I could listen to it for ever; it was the song that Ernest sung to me on the evening before his departure; while, as he wiped away my gushing tears, his own fell on my cheek—now, Miss Seymour, if you please." She then leant back in her chair, covering her face with one hand, while with the other she grasped that of Mrs. Richardson.

Mary's voice was never in better order; she sang with exquisite taste and feeling the first verse, and was proceeding to the second, when a deep sigh from the afflicted widow made her pause.

Mrs. Chudleigh had fainted in the arms of her cousin, whose eyes did ample justice to the beauty of the performance.

The tender exertions of Mary soon recalled the fleeting spirits of Mrs. Chudleigh, who apologized for the uneasiness which she had given, and which was plainly visible on the face of her youthful supporter. "Yet why should I apologize

to you, Miss Seymour," said she, pressing her hand warmly, "for a weakness which *your* heart can well excuse? Pray go on; I am better now; I would not lose the remainder upon any consideration."

Mary hesitated, from a fear of her being again overcome; but Mrs. Chudleigh assured her that she felt able to hear the conclusion, and that no gratification could exceed that which she now felt, on hearing the favourite song of her beloved husband sung with a pathos and sweetness which strongly reminded her of his own performance.

With tolerable firmness she bore the remaining verses, checking, as much as possible, her rising sobs. When Mary had finished, she again expressed her thanks in so warm a manner, and actually appeared to have received so great a pleasure, melancholy as it was, that Mrs. Richardson, taking the hand of Mary, joined it with that of her cousin. "Dearest Maria," said she, "let me have the satisfaction of seeing you receive this amiable

girl as your friend; during the three months that I have had the happiness of knowing Miss Seymour, I have discovered nothing which could lessen the regard I at first entertained for her: young as she is, she has already tasted of the cup of affliction; I am not honoured with her confidence, but you will find her worthy of yours; let me then, dear Maria, have the pleasure of knowing that I leave you to the tender care of my amiable young friend; if any thing can alleviate your sorrows, it will be the society of *such* a companion."

Mrs. Chudleigh turned her languid eyes on the lovely object before her —"Alas!" said she, in a tone of generous disinterestedness, "how can I ask Miss Seymour to become an exile for me? how can I selfishly require that one like her, gifted by nature with every attraction to excite admiration and faithful passion, should, for my sake, bury herself from all the pleasures of the world, and become,

like me, a melancholy recluse? No, dear Miss Seymour, I will not purchase my comfort at the expence of yours; yet let me see you sometimes, if the dulness which pervades my household does not terrify you away; let me enjoy, occasionally, the pleasure of your conversation; you have once again called forth feelings which have long been buried in the grave of my husband; I feel an interest in your welfare, and if, as my cousin says, you have drank of that cup which I have drained even to the dregs, come to my bosom, and we will be sisters in misfortune."

Mary's tears streamed on the hand which she repeatedly pressed to her lips. At length she said, as she held one of each of the cousins—"How shall I express my thanks—my grateful thanks for the kindness I have just received—a kindness so unlooked for, so unmerited! Believe me, that my heart is deeply impressed by my present situation, and that I will endeavour, as far as my circumstances will per-

mit, to prove myself not wholly undeserving such generous friendship."

"I give ample credit to your assertion, my dear Miss Seymour," cried Mrs. Richardson, "and shall feel satisfied, for the present, at your promising to pass as much of your time as you can spare with my beloved cousin."

"And I," said Mrs. Chudleigh, "must think how best I can evince my obligation to Miss Seymour, for her readiness to afford any gratification to a being insulated from society as I am."

Mrs. Richardson now changed the conversation, yet felt inwardly delighted at seeing that the presence of Mary had an enlivening effect on the fragile form of her cousin, who, as she was insensibly led to display her own general knowledge, by the desire of discovering the extent of Mary's, occasionally became animated, and certainly shewed a degree of cheerfulness which Mrs. Richardson had seldom seen since the death of captain Chudleigh.

On their rising to take leave, Mrs. Chud-

leigh said—" May I venture to ask, Miss Seymour, if you are disengaged any part of to-morrow, and if you are, whether you will favour me with a call?"

Mary, flattered by this request from a being whose friendship she was anxious to secure, readily promised to pay her a visit, after she had given her farewell lessons to Mrs. Richardson's daughters, who were going the next morning, with their governess, to town, in order to spend a few days with their grandmother, before their journey to Worthing.

When the carriage of Mrs. Richardson stopped at the door of Sutton's cottage, she proposed, as it was yet early, to go in, and give Mary some account of the amiable being they had just quitted.

Mary hastened to the chamber of her sleeping infant, whence, after bestowing on him her maternal caresses, she returned to the sitting-room, and found Mrs. Richardson busy in recounting to Mrs. Byron the favourable impression which Mary had made on her cousin.

"I have seldom met with any thing which has given me more real pleasure," said she, "than that which I now experience, in the prospect of Miss Seymour's becoming the friend and companion of my dear Maria; that her disorder is consumptive, I am well assured; but still, were it possible to divert her mind from its constant meditation, I have some hopes that she is not incurable."

"God grant it!" replied Mary fervently; "were my dear Mrs. Byron but to see her once, she would not hesitate to pronounce her one of the best of human beings."

Mrs. Byron smiled at the warmth displayed by her favourite, yet felt inwardly convinced that the object of it must, at least to all appearances, deserve it; while Mrs. Richardson assured them both that her cousin's merits really entitled her to be classed among the best of human beings.

"About five years ago," said she, "I accompanied Mr. Richardson on a visit to

the earl of Beaufort, a nobleman as famous for his gallantries as for his personal and mental accomplishments. The house was full of company, who were assembled in order to be present at the celebration of the nuptials of his eldest son. Among them was my cousin, Ernest Chudleigh, who had been the schoolfellow, and was now the bosom-friend of William Beaufort, the earl's second son, then a lieutenant in the navy, but recently promoted to a frigate, and made a baronet for his gallant conduct in taking a French ship of superior force. I was now introduced, for the first time, to the female part of lord Beaufort's family, which consisted of his daughter, lady Victoria, and his two wards, the orphan daughters of governor De Wilton, with their governess, a lady of great accomplishments, who always presided at the table of the earl when her pupils were present, and to whose example and precepts they were indebted for all the estimable qualities they possessed. The eldest Miss De Wil-

ton, I soon discovered, was destined to be the wife of William; her fortune was large, and her person, like that of her sister, extremely pleasing; but her constitution, even more delicate than Maria's, seemed unable to bear with the fatigues of fashionable life. It was impossible to know the amiable wards of the earl without loving them; and I felt pleased to discover that both of them regarded me with reciprocal affection—Maria, perhaps, more than Miss De Wilton, since I had an additional claim on her heart, as being the cousin of Ernest Chudleigh; while the ever-laughing, little romping daughter of the earl, then only fourteen, came in for her share of my regard."

"Pardon my interruption," said Mrs. Byron, "but is not this young lady now become the wife of general Volatile?"

"She is," replied Mrs. Richardson, "and is still the same good-natured, lively creature as ever, though, from circumstances which have lately come to my knowledge, I should have thought that her spirits

would have received a check; nothing, however, appears to damp the natural gaiety of her disposition, unless, indeed, a part of it is assumed, which I have often suspected to be the case."

"The general is so much older than her ladyship," said Mrs. Byron, "that I wonder what could induce her to marry him."

"It was an odd affair altogether," replied Mrs. Richardson; "but the match was made up by her father, and the marriage celebrated in a great hurry. If wealth can purchase happiness, *that* at least Victoria has gained by her union with general Volatile; yet I fear that her consent arose more from pique than from affection; for when my intimacy increased with her family, and my visits became more frequent, I always considered her heart to be engaged to an amiable youth, a *protegé* of her father, with whom she had passed the principal years of her childhood, and to whom her brothers were much attached. The news of her intended union greatly surprised both myself and Mr. Richard-

son; but we forbore to question her on the subject, as it was highly gratifying to her father and her eldest brother.

"But to return to my dear Maria. The attachment which subsisted between her and Ernest soon became visible to her guardian and friends, and lord Beaufort consented that he should receive her hand on the same day that was destined to unite her sister with William. The latter was, however, ordered on a cruise, which detained him several months. On his return, preparations were immediately made for the double wedding; but whether William had a presentiment of the calamity which was to blight his happiness, or from some other unknown cause, it is certain that he betrayed none of that ardour to hasten his bliss, which was observable in Ernest, but, on the contrary, shewed a dejection of spirits, which, to us, who were ignorant of the reason, seemed perfectly unaccountable. The evening before the day fixed on for the wedding, we were invited to a dance given by lord Beaufort, to

a select party of friends and relations. Miss De Wilton had been indisposed for some days; but she now appeared quite recovered, and danced with more animation than usual; her spirits were exhilarated by the happiness which beamed on every countenance around her. Warm with dancing, she imprudently drank a glass of cold lemonade, and was immediately seized with shivering-fits, which continued with such violence, that all were alarmed for her life. Advice was speedily obtained; but nó skill could save her; before the morning, which was to have seen her nuptials, my friend had breathed her last."

Mrs. Richardson paused, deeply affected by the remembrance of departed excellence; while Mary, in whom the name of lady Victoria Volatile had given rise to a variety of painful reflections, connected with her first introduction to Monteith, sat a silent and dejected listener; her tears and sobs, however, informed her venerable friend of what was passing in her mind, and recalled the wandering ideas of Mrs.

Richardson, who now resumed her narration.

"The death of Miss De Wilton cast a gloom over the whole family, which time alone could remove; the nuptials of Maria were of course postponed; and William, who now appeared deeply sensible of her loss, soon quitted us to take the command of his new ship. Maria, out of respect to the memory of a sister tenderly beloved, refused to become the wife of Ernest until the expiration of a twelvemonth. *Her* nuptials were shortly followed by those of lady Victoria; but her happiness was not of long duration: Ernest was obliged to join his regiment, then under orders for Spain; and the tears of Maria, which had hardly ceased to flow for her sister, now streamed afresh at this still heavier separation. Three weeks after his marriage, my poor cousin quitted England; and, among many others, equally brave and equally beloved, was fated to bid adieu to it for ever. At the battle of Talavera he fell, at the head of his men,

in the moment of victory; his dying request was, that his body might, if possible, be conveyed by his faithful servant to Cadiz, there to be buried by the side of his father and brother, who had fallen victims to a contagious fever, which had broken out during their stay in that city some years before. Ever since the fatal intelligence of her husband's death, Maria has continued inconsolable; and though two years have elapsed since it happened, her grief is as lively as ever; her only hope is, that she may not remain long behind him."

"Such examples of conjugal fidelity are rarely to be met with," exclaimed Mrs. Byron; "yet when they do occur, they never fail of exciting our admiration: it is to be hoped that Mrs. Chudleigh may still be spared to enjoy the blessings which her large fortune will enable her to dispense to others."

"Alas!" sighed her cousin, "every feeling is absorbed in one; although barely two-and-twenty, she refuses to see any person but the Beaufort family, and the

relations of her husband; she seldom has spirits to go out even for the air; and, contrary to the advice of her physicians, obstinately persists in remaining at Hampstead, because it was the favourite place of Ernest, and the house to which he carried her on the first day of their union. Notwithstanding her dislike to society, and her repugnance to admit a stranger within her melancholy abode, I have now every reason to hope that the tender sympathy of Miss Seymour will sooth the poignancy of her wounded feelings, and, by degrees, reanimate her torpid spirits, by greatly recalling them into action."

"Dear madam," said Mary, gratefully, "you surely think me possessed of magical powers, for such indeed they must be, that can assuage the anguish of a broken heart; yet, trust me, I will not fail to do all that my humble abilities will allow, to amuse and tranquillize Mrs. Chudleigh, should she wish for my society."

"I hope that it will be beneficial to you both," replied Mrs. Richardson, "and that

I shall hear from Maria a good account of her health, and of her new friend. She is already informed of the disappointment I have received, in being obliged to give up the pleasing idea of having you become one of my family; but I shall no longer regret it, when I learn that you have gained a more advantageous assylum by my loss."

Mary pressed her hand affectionately; and Mrs. Richardson now rose to depart, after desiring her to be with her as early as possible the next morning.

When left alone with Mrs. Byron, Mary could not disguise her feelings, which had been considerably agitated by the recollection of the day on which she had first seen lady Victoria Volatile pass down St. James's-street, to be presented at court on her marriage. A few hours after, and she beheld Monteith; never, never would the remembrance of that day on which she first saw "the handsomest man of the age"—of that day on which she became acquainted with those emotions which she had first witnessed in her early

friend, and which now disturbed her own simple bosom; she flung herself into the arms of Mrs. Byron, and wept in all the bitterness of unsubdued affection; while her faithful friend embraced her tenderly, and mingled her tears with those of her distressed favourite.

"My child! my beloved, my adopted daughter!" said she, in accents of soothing affection, "well do I know what is now passing within your mind, and what ideas the name of lady Victoria has given rise to; banish them from your breast, my dear Mary, as inimical to your peace, and let us read the contents of this letter from your brother, which I would not give you in the morning, lest it should cast a damp on the pleasure of the day."

Mary eagerly took the letter, and kissing it fervently, thanked the Almighty, who had hitherto preserved him to her prayers.

It was the first that she had received from young Fitzroy since her separation from Monteith; and she almost dreaded to open it, lest it should add to her afflictions.

Unable to write to him herself, Mrs. Byron undertook to disclose to him the heavy calamity which had befallen his sister, and at her desire, gave him a candid account of all that had passed, and of the generous and paternal conduct of Mr. Graham; concluding with assuring him that she would never leave her favourite while she was permitted to remain in this world.

George replied to Mrs. Byron's letter; his feelings at that moment were too severely mortified to address even a line to his sister; it was full of the bitterest invectives against the author of her misery, and breathed a spirit of vengeance, which might be well excused in a soul full of honour and proper pride, which started at the remotest shadow of disgrace, and which now felt all its fondest hopes destroyed by the humiliating situation in which a beloved sister was placed.

With trembling hands Mary at length gained courage to break the seal. Passion had subsided in the breast of George, yet his intention of calling Monteith to an

account, as the betrayer of his sister, still remained unchanged; he attempted not to conceal this fixed determination from Mary, whom he now addressed in the tenderest manner, at the same time giving her to understand, that he expected to hear from her, not in the language of complaint or womanly regrets, but in a style which, like his own, breathed only the spirit of just indignation against the cowardly and selfish destroyer of her repose.

"After what has happened," said he, "I can only advise you to remain concealed until my return to England, which, however, is at present uncertain. Should God spare my life once more to embrace you, and the noble friends who have so generously befriended you, I will take care to place you beyond the reach of calumny: it is not improbable but that on my return I may, for your sake, marry earlier than I intended, since I am well convinced that the woman of my choice

will, like me, devote herself to heal the wounds of one so dear to my heart as yourself. Rest tranquil, then, my dear Mary, in the full assurance of my affection, and of my resolution to avenge thy dishonour; if I fall, I shall not leave you unprovided for; if I rid the world of a villain, I shall go to my grave satisfied that my cause is just. To Mrs. Byron and the noble-minded Graham I commend thee; my eternal gratitude is theirs—my deep and deadly hatred is Monteith's. Do not refuse the friendly assistance of Mr. Graham; when I return, I will refund whatever sum he may advance you; but as you value my love, accept not of the gold of your betrayer: never shall my sister be supported by the bounty of a scoundrel—no, Mary; once again you are become a Fitzroy; let your future actions, my sister, wash away the first disgrace that has ever been attached to our family; and let the world be convinced that you are the innocent victim of the cruel deception which has caused me to betray a weakness my

own sorrows never did—yes, Mary, I have actually shed tears of agony over Mrs. Byron's letter; but the blood of Monteith shall efface our disgrace."

"Alas!" exclaimed Mary, as she wiped away the tears which dimmed her eyes, "alas! and is this the means by which my dear George proposes to heal his wounded honour? is it by shedding the sacred blood of him I still idolize, that he intends to pour the balm of comfort into my soul? oh, merciful God!" she continued, falling on one knee, and raising her supplicating hands to heaven, "grant that these two beloved objects may never meet, and that the arm of my brother may never be raised against the adored father of my child!"

"Grant this, oh Power Supreme!" said Mrs. Byron, fervently; "and may the prayers of this innocent young creature find favour in thy sight! continue to support her against the weaknesses of human nature! endue her with strength of body,

with fortitude of mind, to pass nobly through the thorny path of adversity, and crown her efforts to be virtuous with success and peace of mind!"

Throwing her maternal arms round the graceful form of the weeping Mary, she pressed her to her bosom; then leading her to the cot of her slumbering boy, she said—"Behold the consolation, which Heaven has left thee, my Mary; accept the omen with gratitude; the blessing of God—the pledge of future happiness is still thine: he shall plead in artless, yet impressive language, to thy angry brother; already has he saved the life of his mother; it is to him that his father's will be spared."

Mary bent over the beautiful image of Monteith; her heart swelled with gratitude to God and maternal fondness for her child; she felt the value of what still was hers, and bowed submissively to the will of her Creator.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHOUGH Mary, the timid, the doting, the adoring Mary, had, by an effort of human courage bordering on supernatural, resigned all claim to the heart of Monteith, yet her own still beat with agonizing fondness at the sound of his name, or at the recollection of his undying tenderness; it was impossible to gaze on the lovely features of her little boy, or to contemplate his faultless mouth, his bright and brilliant blue eyes, without their recalling to her vivid imagination the matchless person of his father—of that father who, in spite of honour, justice, and humanity, was still ready to devote his life to her service.

Such, in reality, was the case; Monteith, notwithstanding that he felt his pride and affection mortally wounded by the heroic conduct of his Mary, yet nevertheless con-

tinued in secret to worship her senseless image, and to nourish, with religious fervour, the remembrance of all her past endearments. The void which her loss occasioned was but feebly supplied by the gentle Agnes; as a sister, Monteith regarded her; as an affectionate brother, he received the unwearied demonstrations of her love; but Mary still reigned with despotic sway—still possessed every feeling of his soul: gratitude for the mild forbearance of Agnes, and the fatherly kindness of Mr. Graham, joined to the apparently irrevocable determination of Mary never to return to his arms, conquered his once-fixed resolve of denying the legality of that claim which Agnes now enjoyed; separated for ever from the only woman he could love, and by her own free-will, Monteith felt that happiness was for ever beyond his reach; but that to deny it to Agnes would be ungrateful and unmanly: if the empty title of wife, unaccompanied by the heart of a husband, could secure her repose, to withhold it from *her*, who had so gene-

rously contributed to restore him to life, and who had become the acknowledged friend of his Mary—of that Mary who had resigned him to Agnes, was a cruelty of which Monteith was incapable; he therefore consented to the wishes of Mr. Graham, and yielded to the tears of his daughter, still continuing to call her by the name of his friendly nurse.

Monteith bore, with tolerable composure, his journey to Clifton, yet every mile that lengthened his distance from London, seemed to add a pang to his over-burthened mind, for London contained all that could make life desirable. The heavy depression of his spirits was but too visible to his watchful companions, who strove, by the tenderest attentions, to withdraw his thoughts from those objects which now occupied them.

Slowly did the health of Monteith recover from the severe shock it had sustained; even when returning strength once more invigorated his limbs, and he became from necessity an occasional spec-

tator of the different amusements the place afforded, even then the languor of his fine eyes, and the paleness of his cheek, on which the vivid carmine used to glow, still bespoke the remains of disease, and the effects of an unsettled mind.

From Clifton they removed to Bath; and here Monteith met with some of his brother-officers, who, by degrees, contrived to draw him into their society, and consequently into their dissipation.

The family of Monteith were no sooner made acquainted with his receiving Agnes as his wife, than they each sent off congratulatory letters to the brother they had betrayed; and his father immediately granted him his permission to draw on his banker for any sum he might think proper, at the same time inviting him to pay a visit to the home of his childhood, where he would be received with every mark of affection.

Monteith indignantly cast aside the letters, while the blush of anger tinged his cheek—"Never," he exclaimed, "will I

set my foot again within the walls of my father's house! the day on which he exerted the authority of a tyrant lost him the heart of his son!"

"Dearest Donald," said Agnes, pressing his hand to her lips, "I had hoped that my father and sisters would have been included in the generous pardon which you extended towards myself; alas! you know not how deeply I shall suffer, if, through me, they are denied the bliss of once more embracing you."

"Grieve not, my gentle Annie," cried Monteith, "at my voluntary banishment from my family, nor suppose, for a moment, that I include you in my just resentment: you are my wife, Annie," said he, in a hurried voice; "but you owe it to your own merits, not to their remonstrances, or even the threatened disinheritance of my father: write to my sisters; tell them that my health is not yet re-established—that perhaps it never may—and that a journey to Scotland would be the

last thing in the world to restore it: when I am more composed, I will answer my father's letter; I shall not refuse his pecuniary assistance, because I consider it as my birthright."

Agnes did not venture to remonstrate; she longed to throw her arms round the neck of her husband, but was withheld by a fear of offending. Monteith read her wishes in her speaking eyes; casting his own on the ground, he pressed his lips to hers; it was the kiss of friendship, not of love; but Agnes was satisfied, and sat down to execute his wishes; while Monteith hastened to join some friends, with whom he had made an appointment.

The society in which he now passed most of his time was not such as would once have pleased the refined and elegant mind of Monteith; it consisted of a party of young dashing men of fashion, who had more money than wit, and more levity than honour; they gamed high—drank freely—and, in short, committed a variety of excesses, that formerly would have dis-

gusted Monteith; but now they seemed to have just the contrary effect, since there was seldom a night which he did not devote to their revels. Such a life naturally alarmed the prudent Mr. Graham, who remonstrated, in the gentlest manner, upon the folly of his son, in wasting his fortune among such a worthless set, and entreated him to consider that his health was not yet sufficiently recovered to allow of his keeping such late hours; above all, he conjured him to remember that the money thus wasted might be better employed in securing to his infant son what he had a right to demand from the hands of his father—some indemnification for the injury he had done him.

Monteith abstained for a week from his midnight parties, during which time, as the season was far advanced, he consented to leave Bath, and make a summer tour through the most picturesque counties of England, vainly hoping that change of place would bring a respite from pain. He could not refuse to make one at a

farewell dinner, to which he was invited, and which was partly given on his account. The usual excesses prevailed; and Monteith, accompanied by his companions, staggered to the gaming-table. He had already lost a considerable sum, and was proceeding to double the stake, when his arm was arrested by a gentleman who stood behind him, and who had been an attentive observer of all that had passed.

Monteith turned angrily round, to inquire the cause of such a liberty, and beheld, in his friendly monitor, the good-natured Clinton, whose astonishment at witnessing the situation of Monteith for a time had kept him silent; the largeness of the stake, and the evident intoxication of the player, at length roused him from his surprise, which could only be equalled by that of Monteith, on seeing Clinton so near him.

Unable to refuse the proffered hand of a man who had always conducted himself in the most sincere and friendly manner, Monteith, supported by Clinton, accom-

panied him into a private apartment; and calling for a bottle of wine, proceeded to inquire after the health of Mrs. Clinton and her family. The voice, the look, the manner, but above all, the company he had just quitted, alarmed the friendly Clinton, who, taking the glass from his hand, said—

"Do not drink any more, Monteith; you are already too much elevated; be advised, my friend, and Mrs. Monteith will thank me; come, shall I conduct you home?"

"Not for the world!" cried Monteith, wildly grasping his hand; "let us stay here—Clinton, you have not seen Mrs. Monteith; I cannot introduce you to her to-night."

"Not seen the lovely Mrs. Monteith!" exclaimed Clinton, with surprise; "why, my dear friend, you surely forget that I was formerly among the list of her humble admirers, until your superior attractions, after gaining you the title of 'the handsomest man of the age,' made you master of a treasure which I hope still continues to you inestimable: why, Mon-

teith, your mind is sadly wandering, if you have ceased to remember that I was once honoured by the friendship of the beautiful Mary Fitzroy."

At the sound of that name Monteith started from his chair, and, staggering a few paces, sunk into another. Placing his hand over his face, he said, in a faltering voice—"Leave me, Clinton, leave me! I am miserable—I am broken-hearted—I am a wretch for life!"

"God forbid!" cried Clinton, fervently, at the same time advancing towards him, and grasping his hand. "Monteith, I am your friend—have ever been your sincere friend; to meet you thus unexpectedly, and in such company—to see you so unlike yourself—but above all, to hear that the husband of Miss Fitzroy could ever be miserable, has shocked and alarmed me beyond description; for Heaven's sake, explain your meaning; upon my soul, you may rely on my honour—on my secrecy, if it be required."

Monteith pressed his hand, an ashy

paleness overspread his features, and Clinton flew to obtain a glass of cold water, which seemed to revive his unfortunate companion. Excess of grief had now sobered Monteith; he leaned his burning forehead on the shoulder of Clinton, who again entreated him to confide to him the cause of his distress.

Monteith esteemed and respected Clinton; he knew him to be a young man whose word was sacred, and whose friendship, in the present state of his affairs, would afford him real consolation; he therefore determined to disclose to him what had happened, and run the risk of forfeiting his regard, or else secure to himself a friend whose society was now become more valuable than ever.

It was, however, with extreme difficulty that Monteith, after pausing several times to gain breath and to clear his voice, which was choked by the agony of his feelings, made Clinton acquainted with what he still called the treacherous conduct of his

father, and his own consequent ruin. When he came to that part which disclosed his separation from Mary and his child, Clinton could no longer restrain his emotions; he burst into a flood of tears, and throwing his arm round the neck of Monteith, they wept bitterly over the fate of her who was thus become the victim of love.

"By Heavens!" cried Clinton, as he dashed away the tears that rested on his cheeks, "your case, Monteith, is indeed a hard one; yet had I been *you*, I would never have resigned such a woman as Mary Fitzroy—no, never! Sooner should they have torn the soul from my body, than her from my arms!"

"Alas!" replied Donald, "it was not I that gave up my claim to the heart of my adored Mary; it was herself who, from false notions of honour and generosity, abandoned me to despair—to death; had she but remained true to her vow of eternal fidelity, the world could not have tempted me from the heaven of her so-

ciety; but she has coolly consigned me to a life of misery, which, however, will not be a long one."

"Nay, say not so," replied the friendly Clinton; "time may reunite you still; but what, my dear Donald, prevented your seeking Mary? Had you thrown yourself at her feet—had you implored her not to desert you, even though you were no longer able to bestow on her the name of wife, the tenderness of her heart could not have withstood the eloquence of the man she loved; you have been too tame, Monteith, and have suffered yourself to be a second time betrayed."

"No," said Monteith, blushing at the supposition, "in this instance I have not been betrayed; Mary has acted from her own free will; the letter which she wrote, and which nearly deprived me of life, proved that her resolution was immovable; I had a wife, and Mary could not stoop to become my mistress, to infringe on the lawful rights of another: exiled from her presence, the world became a

blank; happiness was for ever extinct in my bosom; yet I possessed the power to bestow it on another. To gladden the heart of a man who had been the friend, I may say the father to my Mary, a word of mine would suffice—would restore his amiable daughter to her friends, to her family, in her proper character: Mary was lost to me for ever; what matter, then, who possessed the barren title of Monteith's wife?"

"I confess," replied Clinton, "that you have acted with more generosity than I could have done; for if I know any thing of my own heart, it tells me that it would rather have ceased to beat, than have acknowledged the legality of a marriage like yours."

"Such were my feelings once," exclaimed Monteith; "but Mary's desertion, and the mild forbearance, the tender and delicate attentions of Agnes, induced me to alter what I had deemed my *unalterable* resolution—to resist the legality of the marriage. In bestowing on her the

name so long desired, so improperly obtained, she was aware that I had nothing else to give—that my bleeding heart, torn and lacerated as it was, must still belong to Mary—that my affections were hers alone—and that I had yielded from gratitude and friendship, not from any sentiment of fear or love. I will not ask you at present, Clinton, to visit me at home; it would be painful to us both. During my stay at Bath, which will be short, let me, however, see you as often as you can."

"We will meet daily, my friend," replied Clinton, pressing his hand affectionately; "are you engaged to-morrow? If not, will you dine with me at the York hotel?"

Monteith replied that he was not; and Clinton, looking at his watch, remembered that Arabella would be uneasy at his stay, and now proposed to conduct Monteith to his lodgings.

When they met next day, Clinton observed, with generous concern, that Monteith had lost the bright colour which

used to add beauty to his features and lustre to his eyes; he was pale and thin; his smile, which formerly was magically fascinating, was now languid and forced, and his whole frame betrayed the lurking remains of his recent illness; while the frequent applications which he made to the bottle only proved his eagerness to banish from his mind, if possible, all recollection of her he adored.

In the openness of mutual confidence, Monteith acknowledged that he was become so totally indifferent to life, that he had allowed himself to be drawn into the society of those by whom he was plundered of a considerable sum of money, and that he had plunged into every dissipation, in hopes of banishing from his mind the beloved form of Mary. All had hitherto been fruitless; although deeply wounded by her refusing still to share his fortunes, the excess of his love overcame his pride, and he still continued to dote on her to madness.

"One hope of relief yet remains," said

he; "it is that my regiment may be ordered abroad; our brave commander has, with the consent of all his officers, applied to the War Office to that effect: I burn with impatience until the answer arrives, which will give me an opportunity of at once being serviceable to my country, and of ending my own existence gloriously in the field of battle."

The kind-hearted Clinton could not hear these melancholy wishes, or behold a man once so celebrated for the beauty of his person and the accomplishments of his mind, now reduced to despair and wretchedness, without contributing all in his power towards alleviating his sorrows, by every friendly artifice; he longed, yet dared not, to introduce him to Arabella, as she was accompanied by her mother, now become the wife of sir Walter Blenheim, and whose inveterate hatred towards Mary remained in all its force; he however contrived to devote a part of each day to Monteith while he remained at Bath, and had the satisfaction of finding that, by

this means, he had preserved him from again falling into the hands of his unprincipled associates. Nor was it without a sigh of regret that he saw him depart, since Monteith had confessed with gratitude his obligations to Clinton, and his wish that he could longer have enjoyed the pleasure of his friendly society. This however was impossible, as Mr. Graham, ignorant of the change in Monteith's companions, became urgent for their departure; and it was not until the morning of his leaving Bath that Monteith gained courage to introduce his friend Clinton to Mr. Graham and his daughter.

Clinton, though considerably agitated, as well as prejudiced against Mrs. Monteith, no sooner beheld her mild and ingenuous countenance, than he felt that the opinion he had formed of her art and dissimulation was erroneous; and though he never could look on her with composure, as the rival of Mary and the cause of her disgrace, he was nevertheless compelled to own, that she seemed to be the character

which Monteith, from justice and gratitude, had described her. After settling the mode by which they should correspond with each other, Clinton took an affectionate leave of Monteith, and returned to his home, full of pity for the blighted prospects of a man he had always esteemed, and friendly anxiety respecting the fate of Mary, for whom he felt the tenderest solicitude.

Arabella was gone out; he had therefore more leisure than he wished to muse on the untimely loves of his unhappy friends. He rang for his little daughter, thinking to divert his thoughts from the painful subject which occupied them; but her engaging playfulness only reminded him of the dishonoured child of Monteith, who, robbed of his birthright, possessed no other inheritance than the tears and blushes of his beautiful mother. Clinton felt his eyes moisten; he rose to return the baby to its nurse, when Arabella entered, followed by lady Blenheim and sir Walter. Mrs. Clinton took her infant from the arms

of its father, while her ladyship, who seemed bursting with the importance of what she had to disclose, immediately began.

"Bless me, Charles! we have met with such a surprise! who, above all people, do you think we have seen this morning?" Then without waiting for his reply, she added—"Who but captain Monteith! *once*, indeed, the handsomest man of the age; but now, oh goodness! only the skeleton of what he was; ah, I see you are as much astonished as we were; but wait until I increase your astonishment; we were driving towards the library, when a barouche-and-four passed us, in which, to my great amazement, sat the captain, another gentleman, and a young lady, but not Miss Mary; she, I suppose, is left at home, while her husband takes his pleasures abroad, or perhaps has, before this, grown sick of her romantic passion of love and a cottage, and chosen some other mate."

"My dear mother," said Arabella, "why

should you cast such a stigma on the name of Mrs. Monteith? There might be reasons why she could not accompany him."

"Because," replied lady Blenheim, spitefully, "I am certain the impudent, saucy creature will never do herself any good; if she has been as contradictory and as aggravating to her husband as she was to me, no wonder that he is brought to death's door, and that he has chosen a milder companion; oh how I longed to stop the carriage, and inquire after his high-spirited lady!"

"Do you know," said Clinton, forcing a smile, to conceal his inward vexation, "that if your ladyship continues to vent your spleen against the lovely Mary, I shall begin to imagine that it proceeds from your regret at her having disappointed you in your intended son-in-law—a supposition by no means flattering to my vanity."

This hint was sufficient to lady Blen-

heim; she instantly altered her tone, at the same time embracing him with every demonstration of affection, and assuring him that she was perfectly satisfied with the change, though she could not forget the insult which had been passed on her by a girl of sixteen, who had uniformly endeavoured to thwart her in every wish she had ever formed. After a few more remarks upon the singularity of their never meeting with Monteith in public, and now and then an ill-natured allusion to Mary, lady Blenheim and sir Walter retired to their own apartments.

They were no sooner gone than Arabella, who had hitherto been silent, said—

"I have some suspicion, my dear Charles, that you knew of captain Monteith being at Bath, and that it was with him you passed those hours from home which you refused to account for."

"Why so, Arabella? It might not be always *prudent*, you know, for a husband to acquaint his wife with every circum-

stance which transpired during his absence from home."

"Ah, Charles! you may try to evade my curiosity, but you will not excite my jealousy; I may not always be so inquisitive; but, in this instance, I am uneasy till I know the truth. I am anxious to hear something about Mary, for whom, notwithstanding my mother's unjust dislike, I entertain a real regard; come, Charles, will you not satisfy me on this point? your looks increase my fears; dear Charles, I am certain you have seen Monteith; and what then is become of Mary?"

Clinton could not withstand the entreaties of his wife; his heart, his eyes were full; and as he knew that she really loved the unfortunate Mary, he hesitated whether or no he should confide to her the fatal calamity, which had nearly destroyed Monteith, and the object of his unhappy passion.

"I *have* seen and conversed with the broken-hearted Monteith; but, Arabella,

dare I trust you with the fatal cause of his misery? will you not betray it to your mother?"

"No, indeed," said she, trembling with fear and amazement; "never shall it escape my lips; but tell me, dearest Charles, what of Mary? why is she not with her sick husband?"

Clinton vainly endeavoured to conceal from his wife what he unjustly felt ashamed to let her see, lest she should think it a weakness; but Arabella was herself too much agitated to think of any thing but her early companion; and Clinton, who knew what were the pains of suspense, disclosed to her, as well as his feelings would permit, the final termination of her friend's earthly happiness. "Remember," said he, "Arabella, that you will draw on yourself my eternal displeasure should you even hint to lady Blenheim a word of what has passed; in confiding this dreadful secret to your bosom, I give you a proof of my love and confidence, of which I believe you to be worthy; long may the

story of Mary's shame, of Mary's woes, be unknown to your mother, who, I am too certain, would only exult in what she would term the downfall of your lovely friend!"

"Trust to me with confidence," replied Arabella, sobbing; "I would not for the world that my mother knew of it. My poor Mary! Oh, Charles! what would I not give to discover her retreat, to render her every assistance in my power!"

Clinton caught his wife to his bosom, and kissing her with an increase of tenderness, which her generous sympathy had created, thought that she had never looked so handsome as at that moment, when she was expressing a wish to alleviate the sorrows of her charming friend. "Alas!" said he, "their sudden absence from home when I called by appointment at Brompton, is now too well accounted for; how little, Arabella, did we think of the ruin into which they were plunged! how bright was the morn of their felicity—how dark its termination!"

"Ah!" cried Arabella, "how well do I now remember the prophetic words of my angry mother—'Before two years are elapsed,' said she, 'Mary will have cause to curse the day on which she gave her hand to Monteith!" My poor Mary! how true the prediction! When we return to town, Charles, you must do your best to find out where she is; it is *now* that our friendship may be of use to her."

The heart of Clinton well accorded with the wishes of Arabella; nor did he fail to put them into execution, as soon as they arrived in London: but all his kind endeavours to trace out the residence of Mary were fruitless; and both himself and Arabella were compelled to give up their generous search, consoling themselves with the hope that chance might, one day or other, prove more favourable to their mutual wishes.

CHAPTER III.

MARY, in obedience to the wishes of Mrs. Richardson, made a point of being with her earlier than usual, that she might give her pupils some additional instructions. This done, she hastened to make her morning's call on Mrs. Chudleigh. Crossing the heath, she was met by Mr. Richardson, whose eyes sparkled with delight at the opportunity thus unexpectedly obtained, and long sought after, of disclosing the admiration her beauty had excited.

"Good-morning, lovely Miss Seymour," said he, catching her hand, and placing it within his arm; "are you going for a walk? If so, I will accompany you, for I have much to say to you."

Mary, blushing at his freedom, instantly withdrew her hand, saying that she was only going a short distance, and must beg

to be excused, if she declined the honour of his company.

"Enchanting creature!" he exclaimed, again taking her hand and grasping it firmly; "do not be so cruel as to refuse this favour to a man who adores you, and who is ready to take you instantly from the irksome situation of dependence, and place you for ever beyond the reach of want, or even the shadow of misfortune."

Mary, surprised and indignant at this unlooked-for insult, for a moment felt unable to reply, and he continued—

"I have been miserable ever since I first saw you; never did I before behold a woman so completely to my taste; make your own terms, my beloved girl; half my fortune is at your service; all I ask is, the undivided possession of your affections."

Mary looked steadily in his face, while her own betrayed the consciousness of injured virtue—"What action of mine, sir," said she, with a dignity which awed even the professed libertine, "could have authorized you to treat me with such un-

manly cruelty? Is it because you have seen me willing to increase my income, by giving lessons to your daughters, that you think me incapable of resisting the temptation of your present offer? Surely, sir, the friendship which I have been honoured with by your amiable wife, might have taught you to respect, rather than insult, my fallen fortunes." Saying this, she broke from his hold, and flew across the path which led to the house of Mrs. Chudleigh, leaving Mr. Richardson, almost for the first time in his life, impressed with the idea that there might exist such a novelty as a virtuous woman.

Notwithstanding the paleness of her cheek and the languor of her appearance, Mary possessed sufficient charms to attract the lawless eyes of Mr. Richardson, and to make her the object of his profligate wishes; he had sought in vain for an opportunity of disclosing his passion, and had frequently passed and re-passed the cottage, in the hope of attracting her attention,

but in vain; neither could he speak to her on her leaving his daughters, as Mrs. Richardson generally walked with her to Sutton's; and now that the long-sought for interview was obtained, it was not a little mortifying to his vanity to be disappointed in his expectations, and to have the most liberal offer he had ever made rejected with disdain by a girl of eighteen; foiled in his first attempt, he nevertheless resolved not to give up the pursuit, but to renew the attack with fresh vigour on his return from Worthing.

Mary, though considerably agitated by the treatment she had met with, soon forgot it in the society of Mrs. Chudleigh, who seemed much gratified by her visit, and pressed her to remain for the day; but Mary felt anxious to reply to the letter of her brother, and therefore declined an invitation which otherwise would have afforded her a great deal of pleasure. She was, however, obliged to promise for the next day, before Mrs. Chudleigh would take a denial.

Afraid of again encountering Mr. Richardson, Mary returned home by a longer road, and thus avoided a second insult, as he had watched her movements, and was waiting impatiently her return.

Mrs. Byron was no sooner informed of the baseness of his conduct, than she expressed her satisfaction at the nearness of the time fixed on for his departure, resolving, until it was passed, not to let Mary go out without the protection of her presence.

Mrs. Richardson, on leaving Hampstead, gave Mary every assurance of the continuation of her regard; she made her, in the handsomest manner, several valuable presents, and entreated Mrs. Chudleigh to consider her as one every way entitled to her friendship: such a request was however unnecessary, as Mary was already the elected friend of the amiable widow, who no longer complained of the tedious length of the hours, when they were passed in the society of her new acquaintance.

Every interview strengthened the af-

fection which Mary felt for Mrs. Chudleigh, and increased her desire to amuse her mind, and divert it from the contemplation of her irreparable loss. Not a day elapsed without the best part of it being spent with her; she read the most entertaining works to secure her attention—played and sang all the newest airs—and, in short, devoted herself with as much zeal to her service, as if she had been a favourite sister, or the friend of her infancy. This disinterested attachment was as warmly returned by Mrs. Chudleigh; she felt restless until the arrival of Mary, and shewed a visible uneasiness at her departure; her conversation was perfectly unrestrained; she made her acquainted with her most private concerns; read to her all the letters she received, and, in general, requested Mary to become her amanuensis. Not a thought, not a wish was concealed from her watchful friend; never was friendship more pure, or affection more tender than that which subsisted between these two unfortunates; and even

Mary, who had hitherto lamented every moment of separation from her child, now quitted him with less regret, in the hope of bestowing peace and consolation to the bosom of Mrs. Chudleigh.

This sacrifice to friendship was repaid by the amiable invalid, who, on her part, strove to render the stay of Mary as little irksome as possible, and therefore always assumed an air of cheerfulness in her presence, and which, in reality, was not always forced, since the sight of her interesting companion never failed to produce the most pleasing emotions; she had heard of the little Donald, and on her expressing a wish to behold him, his mother one morning introduced him to her acquaintance.

Struck by the beauty of the child, she for a time contemplated him with fixed attention; then said—"I have seen features somewhere that strongly remind me of this sweet boy's; but I cannot remember whose they were; dear Miss Seymour, you are very young to be entrusted

with so sacred a bequest; he will become so dear to you, that you will never be able to part with him."

"Never!" replied Mary, clasping him fondly to her bosom; "never can I part with him! he is already dearer to me than my existence."

Mrs. Chudleigh, though surprised at the warmth displayed by her young friend, yet forbore to notice it; she had observed several little circumstances which had excited her suspicion that there was some mystery about the fate of Mary, but she was too delicate even to hint a wish to have her curiosity gratified; it was sufficient that she was evidently struggling against some secret grief, probably the loss of some dear friend, for whom she still continued to wear the garb of mourning, and to whom her earliest and tenderest affections might have been plighted. Had Mrs. Chudleigh known the extent of Mary's secret sorrows, it might have increased her sympathy, but it could scarcely have added to her affection; and though

ignorant of her family and connexions, she yet looked upon her as her equal, and admitted her to the same place in her heart which had been occupied by her deceased sister.

So necessary had the presence of Mary become to the repose of Mrs. Chudleigh, that she felt unhappy when the hour arrived that deprived her of the tender assiduities of her beloved companion; and Mary, unable to resist her persuasions, yet incapable of wholly quitting the house which contained her child, generally contrived to be with Mrs. Chudleigh by eleven, the hour of her breakfast, and to remain with her until late in the evening, when a servant, if it was fine, always saw her in safety to her lodgings, or, if the weather was unfavourable, the carriage set her down at the door of the cottage. It was then that Mary, in all the luxury of maternal fondness, would fold her infant in her arms, and almost smothering him with kisses, gaze with rapture on each glowing feature or well-turned limb, until

the remembrance of his father filled her eyes with tears—tears of unavailing regret, and of undiminished love.

Mary was engaged one morning in reading a new play to Mrs. Chudleigh, when the servant announced sir William Beaufort.

The fair invalid, whose increasing weakness obliged her to repose her enfeebled limbs on a couch the principal part of the day, rose, and threw herself into his extended arms, where she had nearly fainted from surprise and pleasure. Recovering herself, she turned towards Mary, who stood pale and trembling with fear and expectation, and introduced her, saying—"This is my dear friend, Miss Seymour, for whom I would bespeak your esteem, William, were it not unnecessary, now that you have seen her."

The stranger, whose voice and figure had brought to the mind of Mary her early friend, gave a sudden start of surprise; *his* countenance, too, changed, and he became visibly agitated; he nevertheless caught the soft hand of Mary, and

pressing it respectfully to his lips, said, as he gazed intently on her blushing face, "To be the friend of Mrs. Chudleigh is a sufficient passport to my heart; but Miss Seymour possesses even a stronger one than that."

Mary's confusion increased; she cast her eyes on the ground, nor ventured to raise them until she heard the stranger in earnest conversation with Mrs. Chudleigh. She then gained courage to survey the person of sir William; and though much altered by hard service, and a severe wound on the forehead, which had left an indelible scar behind, she had no doubt but that he was her first lover—her noble—her disinterested—her early friend. All that she had hoped was, that she might remain unknown to him, that she might escape his tender condolence; his censure she did not fear; he was too gentle, too good, to blame her for a calamity which was so fatal to her happiness.

"Dearest Maria," said sir William, casting his eyes with restless curiosity to-

wards Mary, "has this young lady become an inmate here? If she has, Victoria will rejoice, when I inform her that you have gained so delightful a companion."

"Miss Seymour lives on the heath," replied Mrs. Chudleigh; "she is so good as to devote the best part of the day to my amusement; my obligations to her are of that nature, which cannot easily be repaid; could any thing have power to stay the ravages of my disorder, it would be the charm of her society: but, my dear William, what has called you thus unexpectedly to town?"

"An order from the Admiralty, to hold myself in readiness to carry out dispatches to our ambassador at Cadiz; I expect to be off in less than a fortnight."

"To Cadiz!" repeated Mrs. Chudleigh, in a faint voice; then pausing to take breath, she added in a low tone—"Do you think, William, that you could gain permission to carry me with you?"

"I have no doubt of it; but why, my dear Maria, do you wish, in your weak

state, to undertake a voyage, the object of which must inevitably increase it?"

"I do not think so, William; it has always, you know, been the chief wish of my soul to visit the spot which contains the ashes of my adored husband; could I but once pay this melancholy duty to the memory of my beloved Chudleigh, I should die in peace. Dearest Mary, have the goodness to write a few lines for me to my uncle, who is one of the lords of the Admiralty; tell him how ardently I desire to be permitted to go to Cadiz with sir William, and that I think it may be the means of prolonging my existence."

Mary, who felt that her own tranquillity was intimately connected with the success of the application she was commissioned to make, and prompted by the dread of Mrs. Chudleigh being unable to go through so severe a trial in her present state of health, ventured to exert the privilege of a friend, and to advise her to postpone the voyage until she was stronger. Sir William joined his entreaties with

those of Mary; but Mrs. Chudleigh remained firm in her determination, and again requested her to write to her uncle, as she was desirous that no time should be lost. Mary reluctantly obeyed; and the servant was instantly dispatched to London with the letter, as sir William had promised to stay the night at Hampstead.

The hurry of spirits produced by the visit of a friend so dear as sir William, and the possibility of being enabled to pay the last sad duty to the memory of her husband, increased the languor of Mrs. Chudleigh to that painful degree, that she was soon obliged to retire for an hour to the solitude of her bed-chamber, leaving Mary to entertain sir William until her return.

She had no sooner quitted the drawing-room, than sir William seated himself by the side of Mary, and expressed his entire conviction of Mrs. Chudleigh being too far gone to derive any benefit from the voyage. He then added, in a tone of sen-

sibility and sweetness, which brought to the remembrance of Mary the days of her early youth, "I do not wonder that a being like my dear Maria should feel solicitous to visit the tomb of an adored husband; it is no more than I expected from her; but I fear, Miss Seymour, that her bodily strength is insufficient for the task; should she accomplish it, she will never, I fear, return to England alive."

Mary's eyes filled with tears; every feature bespoke the tender interest she felt in the fate of Mrs. Chudleigh, as she replied, that such also was her opinion.

Sir William gazed on her with deep attention; he took her hand, as if softened by some internal feelings, and as he raised it to his lips, he said, "Could any thing assuage the pains of disease, and take from the agonies of death, it would be to have such a friend, such a companion as yourself: dear Miss Seymour, I hope you will pardon the freedom of a stranger, but you put me so strongly in mind of a little girl who I had the happiness of knowing for a

short time, some years ago, and for whose welfare I was warmly interested, that I can scarcely remember that it is only within two hours that I have been introduced to you; I seem as if I were addressing my little friend, who, if she is living, must be about your age."

"Such an apology is unnecessary, sir," replied Mary, embarrassed, though highly gratified at finding that he had not forgotten her.

"It is almost certain," he continued, "that Maria will be allowed to put her wish in execution; I hope that *you* will accompany her; do you think your parents will consent to part with you? I will do all in my power to render the voyage a pleasant one; and I pledge the honour of a British sailor to return you in safety to their arms, should death deprive you of our beloved Maria."

"You are very good," said Mary, with increasing confusion, "but I had the misfortune to lose my parents when an infant."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed; "how singu-

lar that *you* should be an orphan, as well as the sweet girl whom you resemble! Do you think the friends whom you live with, Miss Seymour, will object to your going? or, perhaps, you may object to it yourself?"

"My affection for Mrs. Chudleigh would lead me to sacrifice much to her comfort," said Mary; "but the idea of quitting England, especially in time of war, requires some little consideration."

"It does certainly," said sir William; "but trust me, that with such treasures as yourself and Maria on board, there is not a man belonging to my ship that would not freely spill every drop of his blood in your defence."

Mrs. Chudleigh now returned to them, refreshed by a gentle sleep, and inquired whether Mary had favoured sir William by a display of her musical abilities? at the same time passing the highest encomium on her voice and style.

Sir William replied, that he hoped to have the gratification, as he was an ad-

mirer of music, though the duties of his profession prevented him from studying it as much as he wished.

Mary, ever ready to oblige, now sang and played some beautiful airs from the Irish and Welch melodies; while sir William, already captivated by her resemblance to his little friend, could not conceal his admiration of her masterly performance, but expressed himself in terms of the highest pleasure; and when Mary, who was strongly affected by once more beholding her early friend, as well as by the unexpected desire of Mrs. Chudleigh to leave England, rose to depart, at an earlier hour than usual, sir William requested permission to see her home, in a manner so urgent, that Mrs. Chudleigh seconded his wishes, and bade her, if possible, be with her in the morning to breakfast.

When Mary stopped at the door of Mrs. Sutton's cottage, sir William inquired, in a tone of surprise, if it was *here* that her friends resided?

Mary replied in the affirmative.

After wishing her good-night, he hastened back to Mrs. Chudleigh, anxious to learn all that he could of the situation of one for whom he felt a degree of interest which no other female had excited since he bade adieu to his little friend.

Mrs. Chudleigh, who loved Mary, delighted in praising her sweetness of disposition, her tenderness of heart, and her various accomplishments; she dwelt with grateful pleasure upon the benefit she had derived from her society, and upon the disinterested affection which she had manifested, in devoting herself to one who lived in complete retirement, and whose enfeebled body must necessarily prevent her from being an entertaining companion. Notwithstanding this, she told him that Miss Seymour had shewn a readiness to sacrifice all the pleasures of youth, to the melancholy office of enlivening the sinking spirits of a broken heart.

"Beloved Maria!" cried sir William,

embracing her, "why have you so long persisted to remain in a house which must hourly remind you of your loss? Why have you denied all the entreaties of Victoria to make her house your home? It is true, that the eternal gaiety of her disposition would ill accord with your present feelings; yet you might have had your own separate establishment, and an occasional visit from my sister, who wants nothing but steadiness to make her every thing I could wish, would have enlivened a few of the heavy hours which you passed before you knew Miss Seymour."

"I am no stranger to the excellence of Victoria's heart," replied Mrs. Chudleigh; "but you know that I have taken an unconquerable dislike to Mrs. Cringewell, whom I have ever considered as being placed by the general as a family-spy over the actions of his wife; and though your sister's vivacity and good-nature leads her to put up with the vulgarity and ill-nature of her duenna, yet I should be miserable if I were to live under the same roof

with her; I confess that I am so strongly attached to this house now, that nothing would induce me to leave it but my hope of going to Spain."

"You will surely, my dear Maria, invite Miss Seymour to accompany you? I hope you will."

"No, William; that would be yielding too much to self-interest; she has already sacrificed much of her time to my pleasure; I cannot, in justice, expect her to leave England, to run the chance of being taken prisoner, and to be estranged from those she loves with enthusiasm."

"Who are they?" inquired sir William, with quickness; "is she not an orphan? what friends has she, then, to love so warmly?"

"An infant nephew," replied Mrs. Chudleigh, "consigned to her care by a dying sister, until the return of his father, who is abroad, and an old lady, the maternal friend and protector of my dear girl. I know of no other tie she has; yet I fear

that she has lost one which will not be easily supplied, since she still continues in mourning; and many little trifles have betrayed to me that my sweet friend is no stranger to misfortune."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed sir William, feelingly, "and is this lovely young creature without any other protection than what an aged female can afford? Perhaps, Maria, her finances are as humble as the abode she lives in; why is she not wholly with yourself?"

"I do not believe, William, that Mary would leave entirely the habitation which contains her little nephew."

"Mary!" hastily exclaimed sir William; "is Miss Seymour's name Mary? Good God! how strange!" Then recollecting himself, he added, "I once knew a little girl whose name was Mary, and whose person promised to be the image of Miss Seymour; *she* also was an orphan, dependent on the caprice of a worthless woman, who, I fear, continued to neglect those talents which her resemblance possesses,

and which would have rendered her the most fascinating of her sex."

"You speak feelingly, William; is it long since you knew this interesting girl?"

Sir Willam coloured, while he replied with vivacity—"That is not a fair question, Maria; you forget that a sailor is sure to find a mistress in every port he touches at."

"True," said Mrs. Chudleigh; "but your heart, like my own, is incapable of wandering from its first affections."

"It is," replied sir William, with a meaning known only to himself.

His sigh was echoed back by Mrs. Chudleigh, who thought only of her lamented sister; while the mind of sir William, at that moment, was full of his little friend, and of what might have been her destiny.

"Dearest William," said Mrs. Chudleigh, "I could wish, now that you are in town, that you would assist me in making some alteration to my will; it is a melancholy task for you to join in, but I am

anxious to have it done as soon as possible; perhaps you will spare me an hour to-morrow, before you go to town. Should I be suddenly called from hence, it will be a consolation to know that I have, to the best of my power, done my duty as a mistress and a friend."

Sir William could not refuse this painful request; he consented, therefore, to remain until evening, as well from the affection which he bore to Mrs. Chudleigh, as from a secret wish to know more of her lovely companion.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Mrs. Byron was informed of the singular and unexpected discovery which Mary had made of her early friend, she could not help expressing herself, in the fulness of her heart, in terms of sanguine hope and expectation; but Mary soon damped

her affectionate warmth, by saying that she rejoiced at being able to pass unknown to sir William. "Never, my dear mother," said she, "could I bear to become the object of his pity; had I but always kept in mind his generous precepts, his disinterested advice, I should not, as now, have to conceal my name; even the eloquent pleading of the still-idolized Monteith would have lost a part of its power, had prudence and caution guided my actions."

"Or had you been so fortunate, my Mary, as to have had a less sanguine, a less credulous adviser than myself; the fault is mine more than yours, my child; my age and experience should have shielded you against the calamity which has overtaken you."

Mary flung her arms round the neck of Mrs. Byron, and kissing her cheek with filial love, replied—"Reproach not yourself, my more than mother; I have been beloved, nay, adored by Monteith; I have enjoyed the heaven of his society—of his tenderness; I have known a bliss too pure

and perfect to last; reproach not yourself, my best, my dearest friend; we cannot alter the decrees of Heaven."

Mrs. Byron dried her eyes, and returned the embrace of Mary—"Excellent young creature!" said she; "thy virtues will plead for thee at the Throne of Mercy, and still meet their reward: but what, my Mary, will you say if poor Mrs. Chudleigh requests you to attend her to Spain?"

"I think she will not ask it of me," said Mary, hesitatingly, and casting a glance towards the cot of her sleeping boy.

"She is going to perform a duty," continued Mrs. Byron, "that will require all the aid of friendship to support her."

"It will indeed."

"To abandon her in her hour of trial would be cruel."

"Very cruel—terribly cruel."

"I know the romantic ardour, the generosity of your nature, Mary; I tremble lest I should lose you."

"My boy! my Donald!" hastily exclaimed Mary; "he will be the pledge of

my remaining. Alas, my poor Maria! who will wipe away the cold drops of agony from thy brow, as, kneeling at the foot of thy husband's tomb, thy fainting soul invokes his spirit to await thy coming? Oh, who will nurse thee with a sister's care during the sickness of the voyage, and divert thy drooping thoughts from thy painful task?"

"*You* will," replied Mrs. Byron, with sad apprehension; "it is *yourself*, I fear, that will perform this melancholy office."

Mary shook her head; her heart, like that of her adopted mother, was full, and her eyes overflowed with sorrow.

"I will say no more at present, Mary; God will direct you for the best; but remember that you have promised to consult the worthy Mr. Graham, before you take any step of consequence to your future peace."

The next morning when Mary joined Mrs. Chudleigh and sir William in the breakfast-parlour, the languor of her looks

betrayed a sleepless night, and sir William expressed a fear that she had caught cold the preceding evening—"You are too delicate, Miss Seymour," said he, "to be exposed so constantly to the night-air; the heavy dews of autumn may prove injurious to a frame like yours; you must take up your abode altogether with Maria."

Mary looked disconcerted.

"You forget," said Mrs. Chudleigh, "that I hope shortly to embark for Spain; the life of Miss Seymour is far dearer to me than my own; I hold it as sacred, William, as I do her peace; she has already sacrificed too much to friendship."

Mary's eyes filled with tears; she pressed the feverish hand of Mrs. Chudleigh to her lips, who seeing her agitation, inquired if all was well at home? and upon receiving an answer in the affirmative, remained for a few minutes lost in thought; then turning towards her watchful friend—"To-day, my dear Mary, I shall know what I have to expect; it was late before John returned; here is my uncle's letter;

it gives me all the hope I wish for; but you see he would fain dissuade me from my purpose; this evening I shall have his definitive answer."

"You may conclude it as already settled," replied sir William.

"I hope not," cried Mary, inadvertently; then added hastily—"I wish, my dear Mrs. Chudleigh, that you would delay this voyage."

"No, Mary; it is a thing I have long fixed my heart on, and in my situation, any delay would be dangerous; if I postpone it, I may not live to enjoy my wish."

Mary, whose spirits were just then not of the highest order, could not sustain this shock; she rose hastily, and retired into the garden, where, after weeping freely, she felt herself relieved, and again returned to the presence of those whose hearts knew well how to appreciate the value of her emotions.

In order to deceive Mary, Mrs. Chudleigh assumed an air of tranquillity, which in some degree concealed the real weak-

ness of her body; she chatted cheerfully upon various subjects, and even played a lively air on the piano, calling to Mary to accompany her with her voice. Pleased by this change in the looks and manners of Mrs. Chudleigh, Mary fell into the delusion, and actually believed that the hope of at length obtaining what she had so long and so ardently wished for, might produce also a change in the system, as well as the mind of her highly-valued friend.

Not a hint was given to Mary when sir William and his adopted sister retired to perform the request of the latter; neither did Mrs. Chudleigh, on their return, betray any particular alteration of features; while those of sir William evinced his inward uneasiness, though they brightened into a smile as he approached Mary, who had sat down to finish a drawing designed for her sick friend, and who could scarcely conceal her exultation at hearing her performance praised by her early monitor, who displayed in his remarks the knowledge of a master.

It required but little persuasion to induce sir William to pass another night at Hampstead; he was more and more charmed by the person of Mary, though she had lost the magical smile of her early days, and the bright glow of health and happiness, which added to the natural brilliancy of her fine blue eyes; still the whole of her appearance was touchingly lovely, while her form, light and gracefully elegant, was still sufficiently round to be attractive. Sir William viewed her with no common feelings; firmly attached to the little girl he had been compelled to abandon from motives of honour and filial duty, he nevertheless treasured in his breast her image with unabated passion. Robbed by the hand of death of his destined bride, he took, as has already been mentioned, the first opportunity of learning the new residence of Mrs. Scorpion, and of inquiring if Mary still was single? The dark hints of that lady as to the levity and thoughtlessness of her charge, wounded him the more deeply, as he

thought it possible that her improper education and neglected mind might have yielded to the counsels of those with whom she had been permitted to associate. No entreaty, however, could draw from Mrs. Scorpion the name of the man whom she assured him Miss Fitzroy had married, without her knowledge or consent. This unpardonable falsehood she deemed herself safe in uttering, as sir William avowed his intention of quitting England immediately.

Reason, and a variety of circumstances connected with his profession, had conquered the violence of his first attachment; he believed it to have wholly subsided, till the sight of Miss Seymour again called it forth, not with the same vigour, but with equal tenderness. It was gratifying to a man of his elegant mind, and refined ideas of women, to observe that the likeness of his little favourite was, to all appearance, the very being that he could have wished the original; every fresh accomplishment which he discovered in Mary Seymour,

reminded him of the uncultivated talents of Mary Fitzroy; those accomplishments increased his admiration, already strongly excited, and added to his curiosity to learn who were her parents, and to whom was she indebted for an education so superior to her present fortunes.

Sir William Beaufort was a man of taste, sentiment, and genius; the naval profession was not his own choice; naturally domestic, he sighed for the sweets of home, and the society of his family; the conversation and the endearing friendship of women was the charm of his existence; yet he had remained single chiefly from the singular idea that, if he married, his love for his wife would interfere with his duty to his country, and that the recollection of the woman he loved, and of what she would suffer should he fall, might take from his courage, and unnerve his arm in the hour of battle. "When there is a peace," he would say to his father, "I may then be induced to marry; but not until then. I have no wish to gain

the affections of an amiable woman, and then leave her perhaps for ever."

While they were yet at the dinner-table, a messenger arrived from Mrs. Chudleigh's uncle. He had consulted with some of his brother lords on the occasion, and he informed his niece that she was at liberty to embark with sir William, if she yet persisted in her resolution; but he could not help telling her that he deemed it a most imprudent step, and one that he hoped she would yet think better of; if, however, she continued fixed to run the risk of the voyage, he advised her to hold herself in readiness, as the dispatches would soon be closed; and not to fail, in her state of health, to carry along with her a medical attendant.

"I must write to Victoria," said Mrs. Chudleigh, as she folded up the letter; "I know that her affection for me will bring her instantly to town. How long, William, do you think of remaining in London?"

"Certainly not more than ten days.

Perhaps, Maria, as my ship is at Plymouth, you will pass a day or two with lord D'Eresby; you will be more comfortably accommodated at his house than at an inn."

"I mean it," replied Mrs. Chudleigh, casting a look towards Mary, whose fruit still remained untouched on her plate, and whose countenance betrayed the excess of her internal vexation.

"I respect lord D'Eresby," continued Mrs. Chudleigh, "as being the man chosen by my dear father to act with lord Beaufort as my guardian; and as I have always experienced from him every kindness, it would be ungrateful of me were I not to pay him now the *compliment* of asking his advice respecting my voyage; he will of course invite me to his house, where I shall see, for the first time, his daughter, whose beauty I have often heard you describe."

"You will find that I have barely done her justice," replied sir William; "she possesses all the luxurious beauty of her mo-

ther, (whose picture still continues to ornament the bed-chamber of her father,) with a languishing softness of manner, which, joined to a figure correctly beautiful, renders Miss D'Eresby a dangerous companion for our sex."

"What, dearest Mary, are you thinking of?" inquired Mrs. Chudleigh, taking her chill hand in hers. "Feel, William, how cold she is! I fear, my love, you are not well."

Mary blushed, as she felt the gentle pressure of sir William. "I am a bad dissembler," said she, looking affectionately in the face of Mrs. Chudleigh; "so I may as well confess that I am not perfectly well."

"Then stay here to-night, dear Miss Seymour," said Sir William, hastily; "I am sure it was the damp air of the heath that has given you cold."

"Will you remain with me, my dear Mary? I will send to let Mrs. Byron know."

"Oh no, I thank you," said Mary; "my

valued friend would be unhappy, lest I should be seriously indisposed, as she is certain that nothing but inability would detain me from her."

"And from the lovely little Donald: I think, Mary, *he* is the attractive power that draws you to your home."

Though this was said without any meaning by Mrs. Chudleigh, it called up the deep crimson into the cheek of Mary, which increased as she caught a glance of the eyes of sir William fixed inquiringly on herself. Much embarrassed, she yet ventured to reply—"You are right, my dear madam; I should be indeed very unwilling to pass a night from my beloved nephew."

Mrs. Chudleigh then entreated her to return before it was damp, and to take something for her cold; but Mary assured her that the indisposition she felt proceeded from her mind. She then seated herself at the harp, and played some exquisitely-pathetic airs, which well accorded with the melancholy of her feel-

ings; till remembering that the indulgence of her own sorrow might be injurious to her beloved friend, she struck the chords in a more animating strain, while her attentive listeners felt and acknowledged the magic of her touch, and the silvery sweetness of her voice.

Sir William again requested permission to see her home, and was not refused. The rising moon guided their steps across the heath. Mary was silent, and sir William appeared equally thoughtful; at length he laid his hand on the little gate which opened into the front garden of the cottage, and with the other pressed to his lips that of his melancholy companion. "I shall have left Hamptead to-morrow, dear Miss Seymour," said he, "before the hour of your visiting Mrs. Chudleigh; can I execute any commission for you in town?"

Mary thanked him, but replied in the negative.

"I hope," he continued, still pressing her hand, "to have the happiness of

seeing you in the course of a couple of days; perhaps you will then have determined upon accompanying Maria in her painful voyage; should the wind be fair, we shall reach our destined port in the course of a few days."

"But the length of my friend's stay is uncertain," said Mary, in a hesitating voice.

"She would return with me," he replied, "and I do not expect to be absent more than a month at furthest."

"A month!" repeated Mary; "that, under *some* circumstances, is an age."

"True," said he, feelingly; "under *some* circumstances it is indeed an age. But I will not detain you, lovely Miss Seymour, lest your health should suffer. God preserve and bless you!" Saying this he again respectfully kissed her hand, and having waited until the door was opened by Mrs. Sutton, he returned to the house of Mrs. Chudleigh.

The whole of the following day, and best part of the next, was spent by Mary

in assisting the amiable invalid in arranging her affairs for the voyage, and in destroying those papers which she did not wish to leave behind her; at length, wearied with the exertion, she was obliged to lie down on a couch; while Mary, under her direction, continued singly the painful task.

"That cabinet, my dear Mary," said Mrs. Chudleigh, "contains the letters of my adored Ernest; they must accompany me; and should I never again return to my native country, they must be buried with me, as well as his miniature; bring it here, my love; I will read you some of his dear letters."

Unlocking the cabinet, she took from it a packet, and kissing fervently the well-known characters, read, in a broken voice, the effusions of a heart which, while it burned to chastise the boasted arrogance of France, melted with affection and manly tenderness for the beloved wife he had quitted ere the honeymoon was over. His last letter, which his afflicted widow

vainly endeavoured to repeat to her weeping friend, overcame her weak nerves; she sunk on the bosom of Mary, almost senseless; but the pressure of her sobbing companion, who strained her affectionately to her breast, recalled her fleeting spirits. "Oh, my dear Mary!" she cried; "your friendly heart feels for my sufferings; it sympathizes in my sorrows; but never can you judge fully of my irreparable loss, unless, like myself, you had been deprived of all you held sacred—of a husband you adored."

Feeling the form of Mary tremble convulsively, and seeing her agitated almost to fainting, Mrs. Chudleigh continued—"Beloved Mary! friend of my bosom! moderate this generous excess of pity; oh God! may the tears of this dear girl never stream for herself—may she be fated to taste only the sweets of love, not its bitters!"

"Vain is your friendly prayer, dearest Maria!" exclaimed Mary, turning on the invalid her beautiful countenance bathed

in tears; "I am already entitled to judge of *your* sorrows by the keenness of *my own*, if a heart nearly broken by the loss of all it loved on earth can claim so sad a privilege."

Mrs. Chudleigh flung her arms round the neck of the distressed Mary; she kissed her pale cheek, and dried the fast-falling tear which dimmed her sight. "Alas! alas!" she cried, "I thought my love for you could not increase; but now that you have owned to be my sister in affliction, I find my affection doubled; oh, my friend, thy tenderness has beguiled *me* of many a painful hour; cannot I perform the same pleasing task for thee? cannot my friendship alleviate thy distress? or does thy fate, like mine, (which Heaven forbid!) admit of no relief?"

"None!" replied Mary, sighing deeply as she spoke; "I have lost the charm which made life valuable; the dear infant entrusted to my care is the only tie which now binds me to the world; even thy friendship, dearest Maria, would not be

sufficient to enable me to drag on a cheerless existence."

Mrs. Chudleigh no longer thought of her own griefs, as she gazed on the lovely form before her, and as the sounds of Mary's voice still vibrated on her ear and on her heart. "I will not pry into the secrets of thy soul, dearest Mary, or take advantage of thy present sorrow; it is enough that you are unhappy, and that I am confident that you *deserve* my affections."

"I have confessed too much not to disclose the whole," said Mary; "all that I ask of you, my dear friend, is, that you will never even *hint* to any human being that I am otherwise than what I seem."

"The world should not induce me to betray thy confidence, my Mary; but, dearest girl, do not give it if it will cost you too much pain; I *am* satisfied that my friendship is not bestowed on an unworthy object."

"I shall be more at ease," said Mary,

"after I have convinced you that my sorrows are not those of fiction; forgive me, however, if I conceal even from you my real name, (for that of Seymour is only an assumed one), and those of the friends whom I shall be obliged to mention."

She then recounted, as well as her feelings would permit, the short, but affecting history of her misfortunes, with a simplicity so touching, that Mrs. Chudleigh scarce breathed, lest a word of what she said should escape her. She dwelt with enthusiasm on the tenderness which subsisted between her and Monteith, and painted in such glowing colours his ardent affection for herself, that Mrs. Chudleigh, who at first felt disposed to condemn, soon learnt to pity him; while her admiration was strongly excited by the generous and noble conduct of Mr. Graham and his daughter. Nor was Mrs. Byron forgotten by Mary, who rejoiced at having an opportunity of describing the virtues of her maternal friend.

When she had finished, Mrs. Chudleigh

embraced her with great tenderness, saying—"Beloved Mary, I cannot describe to you what I feel on your account; I had always thought *myself* the most unhappy, the most miserable of human beings; I considered, that in being separated from my husband within the little space of a month after our union, my lot was the most cruel; but yours is still more severe. I know not whether to love or to admire you most, for the tenderness of your heart, or the romantic generosity of your mind, which led you to give up to your rival the man whom you adored, and who adored you with equal fervour. Such an instance of self-denial is rarely to be met with; and I hope that God, who gave you strength and fortitude to rise superior to your fate, will mercifully reward your virtuous heroism, by, one day or other, reuniting you to your lover."

"Such a thought has never crossed my mind," replied Mary, wiping away her tears; "I have resigned for ever the idol

of my soul; it is for him that I continue to wear this melancholy garb; it is for him that my first and last prayers are breathed; it is alone for his child that I wish to live—for that dear infant, who at this moment reminds me, that his claims to the heart of his mother are stronger even than yours, dearest Maria."

"I understand you, my Mary; I know all that you are capable of performing, but I am not so selfish as to require of you such a sacrifice to friendship. If I live to return to England, we will not, however, be separated; my house shall be the home of yourself and your child, and the good Mrs. Byron shall be a parent to us both; you must bring her, Mary, to see me; I long to be introduced to her; I long to tell her how much I love her, for her kindness towards my friend. You will forgive me, my dear Mary, if I own to you, that both Mrs. Richardson and myself thought it rather singular that so young a woman should be entrusted with the charge of an infant, especially in your un-

protected situation; yet the purity of your mind, and the delicacy of your manners, repelled every idea that could bring a stain upon your character."

"Alas!" exclaimed Mary, "it was to avoid this degrading suspicion that I resolved to pass for the aunt of my beloved boy, hoping by this to elude the prying eye of curiosity; I think I should die with grief and shame were I to encounter the voice of censure, or the eye of scorn; yet to part with my child is more than I am able to perform."

As it was now late, and sir William not yet arrived, Mary prepared to return home, after receiving again the assurance of Mrs. Chudleigh, that not a word should escape her lips of what had passed between them.

Mary's spirits were too much depressed that night to converse much with her venerable friend; her little boy was yet up, neither Sophy nor Mrs. Byron having had power to entice him to go to bed until the return of his mother. In her arms, and pressed to her fond bosom, the lovely

cherub soon sunk to repose; while the doting Mary, as she gazed on his heavenly countenance, deemed it impossible for her to leave him, though for the short space of a month. Notwithstanding that she was absent from him almost all the day, the baby evinced for her a decided preference, and had lately shewn a restless impatience for the coming of the hour which in general brought with it his tender parent; it was then that he pressed his innocent lips to hers, and called her his dear, his pretty aunt; till, wearied with bestowing on her his infantine caresses, his little head would fall on her bosom, his bright blue eyes, half closed, would open now and then, to take another look on the face of her who adored him, till completely overcome by sleep, he was conveyed to his cot by the mother whose life he had preserved, and who, in return, had dedicated that life to him.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Mary entered the drawing-room of Mrs. Chudleigh, it was considerably beyond her accustomed time, as she had been detained in conversation with Mrs. Byron, who scrupled not to avow her fears lest her beloved child should be seduced from her home by the deserted situation of the fair invalid.

"You are late, my dear Mary," said Mrs. Chudleigh, embracing her; "William is not yet come; his absence, I dare say, is occasioned by letters from home, and he waits to accompany his sister, who was on a visit to her father; to-day we shall most likely see them; Victoria, I well know, will lose no time to answer my letter personally; but, my dear Mary, I wish to give you some idea of the character of Mrs. Cringewell, who will of course at-

tend her ladyship, and who is my aversion. I hardly think it possible that even your unsuspicious nature could be deceived in her; it may nevertheless be as well to put you on your guard against her *flattery* and *affection*.

"Mrs. Priscilla Cringewell (you will not believe it when you see her) is the daughter of a *gentleman*, a man of family and fortune, in Northumberland. From the first dawn of reason she shewed a dislike to the restraints of education; and as it was not deemed of so much consequence fifty years ago as it is now, she was suffered to grow up with not quite as much learning as many a lady's maid; she could just read well enough to con over a newspaper, and write well enough to express herself in rather better terms than she conversed in; her poverty of intellect was made up by a large share of cunning and low-bred artifice; she was early instructed in all the necessary economy of house-keeping; the pastry, jellies, preserves, &c. were all made by the fair hands of Miss Priscilla, as

every visitor was carefully informed; and not a professed cook could talk with more fluency upon the art of cookery, and the sending up a dinner, than she did. Though she was possessed of no more taste than her father's kitchen-maid, she would in general give her opinion on dress whenever it became the topic of conversation among her female companions, never failing to excite either the smile of pity, or the sneer of contempt, when her ignorance was thus vainly displayed. Notwithstanding the deficiencies of her mind, her person, which when young must have been extremely pretty, secured to her the affections of a neighbouring gentleman, the friend of her brother, a young man of high expectations, great personal attractions, and what is still more extraordinary, of taste and elegant manners. The match was made up with great haste by the younger branches of the family, and Miss Priscilla, unknown to her parents, became the wife of Mr. Cringewell when she was barely fifteen."

"I fear he soon repented of his imprudence," said Mary.

"You shall hear," replied Mrs. Chudleigh. "The fondness displayed by the young couple soon betrayed to her parents their clandestine marriage: at first they were offended at the little respect paid to themselves; but after some private consultations they agreed to overlook the want of proper confidence and duty in their daughter and her husband, who for some time continued to reside at the old family-mansion with his youthful bride. In less than four years Mrs. Cringewell became the mother of three children; the last, a boy, was born on the same day as that which decided a chancery-suit, which his father had every just reason to expect would make him master of a noble fortune; it, however, was awarded to another; and thus were the ambitious hopes of Mrs. Cringewell and her husband for ever blighted. Compelled to abandon the house in which they had for three years resided, and which they hoped was their

own, Mrs. Cringewell once more returned to that of her father, while her distracted husband immediately left the North and came to London, in hopes of obtaining some employment which would enable him, as he said, to provide for his family; but certain it is, that he never returned, or ever after held any communication with his wife."

"Poor woman!" exclaimed Mary, with feeling; "in that case she was to be pitied."

"I thought so once," said Mrs. Chudleigh; "but a person who is well acquainted with the life of Mrs. Cringewell, has informed me of circumstances which soon changed my *pity* into contempt. Distracted at the loss of property which he had been taught to consider as certainly his own, and perhaps disgusted with the low-bred vulgarity, ignorance, and levity of his wife, Mr. Cringewell, with a female companion more suited to his taste, embarked for America, leaving his children to the benevolence of their maternal grandfather; and his wife to follow, if she pleas-

ed, the bent of her private inclinations. To this day you will hear her talk of him with an affected semblance of pleasure, and cry at the mention of his name; yet this dear, this ever-to-be-lamented husband, whose loss had nearly deprived her of reason, was forgotten as soon as the first voice of a lover assailed her ears. I am ignorant of the full extent of that criminal vanity which induced her to quit the protection of her father, and to throw her children entirely on his mercy. From him they have received an education which must make them blush for the want of one in their mother; I believe that it may be said they have seen her, and that is all. Her mode of living and her choice of companions have been equally reprehensible: always attended by two or three favoured admirers, she has contrived to attend all the fashionable amusements, the different watering-places, and was once on the brink of falling a prey to the designs of a footman, who, dressed in his master's clothes, and aping his master's follies, had

nearly brought her to consent to their union, by representing himself as what he was not. This was after many years had elapsed, and not even a line from her husband had arrived to denote his being in existence. Her unlucky passion soon became public, and she was obliged to quit the scene of her disgrace with all possible dispatch."

"What a dreadful situation for a woman of delicacy!" said Mary.

"True, my friend; but as Mrs. Cringewell is not over-burthened with that unfashionable quality, she soon forgot the vexation she had met with: among a variety of lovers, who made her house their constant resort, and whose presents contributed to the support of it, it is rather singular that some of them have been really men of mind and refined sentiments; one in particular was so seriously attached to her, that he actually proposed to marry her, against the consent of his father and friends: the day was fixed, every thing was prepared, when the father of

this young man, a worthy baronet, and the parent of a large family, forcibly detained his infatuated son, and carried him to his country-seat, many miles from town, where he continued until he had recovered his senses and cooled his passion, by the strong representations of his father, who had gained more knowledge of Mrs. Cringewell than his son's attachment would at first believe. The brother of the lover was deputed to break the news to the lady, and to offer any indemnification which she might demand. Although the pure and heaven-born passion of love could never have inhabited the polluted bosom of Mrs. Cringewell, it is certain that she felt bitterly this heavy disappointment, and refused, as *she* says, to receive any reward for her loss; she nevertheless continues to receive an annuity of three hundred a-year, which is hers while she remains single."

"Of course, then, she will never marry," said Mary, "unless, indeed, she could ensure to herself a larger income."

"I should think not," replied Mrs.

Chudleigh; "her disposition is too light and inconstant to settle to one object, yet she still continues to trifle; and though near fifty, expects the undivided homage of every gentleman of her acquaintance. The present general Volatile met with her during one of her summer excursions, and being related to her family, introduced himself with very little ceremony. Since then she has been his confidant and bosom-friend; his house has always been her occasional home; and even after his marriage with Victoria, Mrs. Cringewell has always made one at his table. When the general was ordered abroad, it appears that he requested her to devote herself entirely to the protection of his young wife, whose high spirits and natural thoughtlessness of disposition required the presence of a maternal friend to countenance actions which, though innocent, might be construed otherwise by the illiberal; by such, indeed, as Mrs. Cringewell herself."

"The request of the general was not very pleasing, I should think, to her lady-

ship," said Mary; "neither was the choice of her companion extremely flattering."

"Victoria's good-nature leads her to overlook this conduct of her husband; I believe though that she is well aware of the real character of her duenna; and in order to avoid the eternal fatigue of her tongue, which is never silent, she has given her full power over the domestic concerns of her establishment: by this means she secures to herself the best of the morning, as Mrs. Cringewell, who prefers good living to almost every thing else, takes care to make herself perfectly acquainted with the state of the larder, and to have a liberal bill of fare, at the same time that she restricts the unfortunate servants, who, were it not for the love they bear their mistress, would soon free themselves from their tormenting overlooker. I often wonder how Victoria can tolerate, for a day, the society of such a woman; and did I not know her to be above setting any value on the fulsome compliments and sickening flattery of Mrs. Cringewell, I should really

attribute to this her wonderful forbearance. I wish to guard you, my dear Mary, against her seeming attachment; she will profess a warm affection for you at first sight, but beware of her; she even is more dangerous as a friend than as an enemy; and should you unluckily become an object of greater attention than herself, she will not be very delicate as to what reports she may raise to your disadvantage."

"Heaven defend me from the misery of being known to her!" exclaimed Mary, fearfully.

"And yet, for my sake, my dear girl, I hope you will not refuse to be introduced to her; for mercy's sake do not let me suffer any other penance than what her presence will inflict."

Mary smiled affectionately on her faithful friend—"For *your* sake," she replied, emphatically, "I would encounter a much greater evil than even the dangerous society of Mrs. Cringewell."

Towards the close of the day, the travelling carriage of lady Victoria Volatile

arrived, and with it her ladyship and her duenna. The tenderness with which she embraced Mrs. Chudleigh, and the anxious inquiries she made after her health, immediately prepossessed Mary in her ladyship's favour; she, however, could not avoid regarding her companion with a look of dread, while Mrs. Cringewell, in return, observed her with a scrutinizing eye.

"My beloved Mary!" said Mrs. Chudleigh. Mary hastened towards her. "Lady Victoria Volatile, Miss Seymour: Mrs. Cringewell, Victoria, to this young lady I am indebted for the only cheerful moments that I have known for these two years; love her first for my sake, and then for her own."

"You have made a request that I shall perform with pleasure," replied her ladyship.

"*Dear* Miss Seymour!" cried Mrs. Cringewell, hastily advancing towards Mary, and kissing her cheek, "I am your friend for ever; I am eternally obliged to you; next to my *lovely* lady Victoria,

Mrs. Chudleigh is the *dearest* friend I have on earth."

"Where is William? He was to have been with me yesterday," inquired Mrs. Chudleigh.

"He will be here to-night," replied her ladyship; "but I know that his business will detain him until late."

Mrs. Chudleigh now rose to accompany lady Victoria to her dressing-room. Looking significantly at Mary, she said—"I will trouble you *this once*, Miss Seymour, to have the goodness to conduct Mrs. Cringewell to her chamber."

For the first time Mary felt a repugnance to comply with a request of her friend; she however was obliged to offer her arm to the buxom widow, who all of a sudden was so very much fatigued with her journey, that she really could not ascend the stairs without the assistance of Miss Seymour. Common politeness compelled Mary to remain with Mrs. Cringewell while she was changing her dress, as

she could not with decency quit her while she was asking a thousand questions, and replying to most of them herself.

Mary gazed on her with astonishment as she arrayed herself, with the assistance of her waiting-maid, for the evening; she expected to see sir William Beaufort, and therefore decked herself out in what she deemed her most becoming dress. Having taken off her riding-habit and black beaver hat, she first rubbed on her face and neck a sufficient quantity of pearl-powder to conceal the yellowness of her skin; her cheeks were then highly rouged, and her eyebrows received an additional stroke from the pencil; a bright chesnut wig covered her dark grey hair, on which she placed a wreath of primroses and violets, to match a pale and delicate robe of yellow silk, cut very low in the back and bosom, the latter of which she seemed proud of displaying, even to Mary, who felt the colour tinge her cheek, as she recollected that this wanton violation of

decency was the act of one whose age and experience should have taught her to be more prudent.

"I think," said Mrs. Cringewell, as she surveyed her full person in the glass with evident satisfaction, "that the present mode of dressing is highly becoming; don't you, Miss Seymour?"

"If not carried to excess," replied Mary.

"Ah, I see you are, like Mrs. Chudleigh, no advocate for fashion; but she may be excused, poor *dear* creature, she has such bad health: you look rather sickly, Miss Seymour; why, for goodness' sake, don't you wear rouge? you would look as well again: you are dreadfully pale; let me put a little on—do, now; you will never be admired by the men unless you take my advice; and really, my *sweet* girl, you are very pretty."

"No, thank you," cried Mary, shrinking from her grasp.

"Oh, you little silly thing! I suppose you fear the censure of Mrs. Chudleigh, who, though one of the *best* creatures in

the whole world, and my great favourite, has yet some very odd notions. Now I think of it, Dixon, give me that lace handkerchief, I must throw it over my shoulders, for fear that my *very dear friend* should be alarmed for my health this chill evening. Do I look tolerable, Miss Seymour?" again surveying herself in the glass; "sir William is a man of taste, and I should not choose him to think me ill-dressed."

"Rest satisfied, madam," replied Mary, "that sir William can only have *one* opinion of your charms, and that must be the same as every man of taste."

"Oh, you dear creature! I must kiss you for that, it was so prettily said: come, let us go down into the dining-parlour; I hope we shall have the dinner well cooked; I have not patience to see good things ill dressed; do you know what the bill of fare is to-day?"

Mary answered in the negative; and they now descended to join Mrs. Chudleigh and lady Victoria: the former, on beholding the exposed dress of Mrs.

Cringewell, cast a glance at Mary, expressive of her disgust; while the eyes of lady Victoria, who held out her hand as she entered, convinced Mary that her partial friend had made *her* one of the subjects of their conversation.

Fortunately for all present, the dinner was served up exactly to Mrs. Cringewell's palate; she picked a little from one thing, then from another, until she had tasted of all the dishes; and what was very wonderful, found not a fault with any of them. The dessert, however, was not quite so excellent; but the wines made amends; *they* were *so good*, that she really must take an extra glass. Mary, who had unluckily become her *very dear friend*, was the chief person to whom she addressed herself; and Mary sat like Patience on a monument, not, however, smiling at grief, but listening to the vulgar display of Mrs. Cringewell's knowledge in cookery.

"How I should like to instruct you, my *lovely* girl, in this necessary art! do you know that I in general make all the pastry

and nice things at lady Victoria's? I save her the expence of a housekeeper, which you know is an object in these hard times; it is not merely the wages, it is what those creatures waste, that is of consequence; and her ladyship, *sweet angel!* is so grateful to me for the care I take in managing her domestic affairs! My lord Beaufort, her *dear* father, says, he thinks there is not such another woman in the world as myself: when I am at Beaufort House, I make myself quite at home; I go and chat with the old housekeeper, *dear good soul* that she is! and she lets me just do as I please: my lord likes no pastry so well as mine."

"Are you giving Miss Seymour a lesson in housekeeping, Cringewell?" said lady Victoria, smiling good-naturedly.

"I fear she will make but a bad scholar," cried Mrs. Chudleigh; "although in many other things she is perfectly able to become a master."

They now returned to the drawing-room, where Mary vainly hoped to escape

the wearisome monotony of Mrs. Cringewell's tongue; she however found that to be impossible, as talking was necessary to her existence: all that she had therefore to do was, to bear quietly with this unavoidable evil until the arrival of sir William, who, she doubted not, would then become the object of Mrs. Cringewell's attention."

While poor Mary was thus tormented, lady Victoria was endeavouring to persuade her friend to give up, or at least to postpone, her visit to Cadiz; she represented all that she would suffer in her present state of health from a sea-sickness, and from the melancholy purport of her voyage: but vain were her friendly counsels; the mind of Mrs. Chudleigh was already made up to the trial; she only felt a regret at leaving Mary behind. Could she with propriety ask her to accompany her abroad, she would then leave England with satisfaction: this wish she, however, concealed from lady Victoria, at the same

time that she was lavish in her praise of the friend thus recently acquired, yet so sincerely beloved.

Mrs. Cringewell even forgot for a moment her favourite topic, and begged and prayed of her *dear*, her *darling* Mrs. Chudleigh not to go to Spain. "If your husband was living, indeed, it would be a different matter; but, for God's sake now, *dear* Mrs. Chudleigh, what is the good of running so much risk, only to look at his tomb? Ah me! dearly as I adored my poor, dear Mr. Cringewell, yet I would never have gone after him to America, unless I could have been assured that he was alive to welcome me; no woman could dote on a man more than I did on him; and I believe that he worshipped the very ground I trod on, until he lost that estate which drove him mad, and sent him abroad."

Just at this moment, when the eyes of Mrs. Cringewell were full of ready tears, which she could call forth at pleasure, sir William made his appearance.

"Bless me!" said she, "Miss Seymour, how do I look? Have I not made myself a fright? I had not an idea that he was so near us." The approach of sir William, who had finished speaking to Mrs. Chudleigh, made her turn from Mary towards him. She requested that he would sit down by her and tell her the news, for she was dying for want of his presence to animate her sinking spirits.

"You are not serious, my dear Mrs. Cringewell," cried sir William, gaily, as he placed himself between her and Mary on the sofa; "with such a companion as Miss Seymour you can never be dull; has she favoured you with her enchanting voice?"

"No, sir William," she replied, playing with the lace handkerchief, which occasionally exposed to him her bosom; "but now that you are come, I dare say that Miss Seymour will be so good." This was not said from any wish to hear the enchanting voice of Mary, but from a desire

to enjoy, undisturbed, a *tête-a-tête* with sir William Beaufort.

At the request of Mrs. Chudleigh, Mary seated herself at the piano; but neither the beauty of her voice, nor the excellence of her playing, could silence the loquacity of Mrs. Cringewell, and sir William found his politeness severely tasked to keep him by her side.

"I hate music," said she; "I often wonder what there is in it to make people appear as if they were enchanted; yet I do not dislike a good song; and Miss Seymour has a very pretty voice."

"It is an uncommonly sweet one," replied sir William, vexed at the interruption; "I could listen to it for ever."

"She would be a good-looking, nay, rather a handsome girl, if she was not so pale: don't you think so, sir William?"

"I think," said he, "that colour is absolutely necessary to shew off a plain face; but though it is a great improvement even to a handsome one, fine features must always be gazed on with admiration, even

though the cheek be colourless. Miss Seymour's paleness, I rather think, proceeds from recent indisposition."

"Then you think her handsome, sir William? But you probably prefer a little delicate girl, like Miss Seymour, to a woman of a maturer age."

Sir William understood the question; his eyes naturally turned on the lady who had made it; the freedom of her looks and the exposure of her person, which at her time of life was even more disgusting than in youth, produced on his mind a far different effect to that intended; Mary, her fine form dressed in black silk, with a tucker of white lace, which totally concealed her fair and beautifully-proportioned bosom, with no ornament on her head, except her own rich brown hair, was so striking a contrast to Mrs. Cringewell, that, was it possible he could hesitate to which to give the preference? Was Mary, modest and diffident in all her actions, for a moment to be compared with the grossly-indelicate and wanton figure by his side?

"By Heavens!" thought sir William, "the general must be mad to have placed this woman as a model for my young sister to copy from: should Victoria become *her* pupil, he will have no wife to receive him when he returns."

"What are you thinking of, sir William?" said Mrs. Cringewell, looking full in his face, and then pretending to adjust her necklace.

"I was thinking," he replied, "that it was strange you should have deemed it necessary to ask the question you did, since there could be no doubt of the real state of my sentiments."

The inordinate vanity of Mrs. Cringewell led her to believe that the preference would be given to herself; she therefore smiled encouragingly on sir William, who felt some consolation for the deprivation he suffered, when he saw that his sister seemed to pay particular attention to the performance of Mary, to whom she behaved with a kindness which denoted that she was already informed of her value.

When Mary retired for the night, Mrs. Cringewell asked a hundred questions concerning her—where did she live? to whom did she belong? had she any fortune? To all of which Mrs. Chudleigh coolly replied, that Miss Seymour was at present with a friend on the heath; that she was an orphan, who had become as dear to her as a sister ever could, and that she was an example of disinterested and generous friendship. Although silenced by this guarded reply of the amiable invalid, Mrs. Cringewell nevertheless determined to try what could be gathered from her own maid, whom she desired to gain, as soon as possible, all the information she could respecting the young person so highly praised and so highly beloved by Mrs. Chudleigh.

CHAPTER VI.

In obedience to the orders of her mistress, Dixon made the necessary inquiries of Mrs. Chudleigh's maid, who, for some reason or other best known to herself, was not quite so friendly inclined towards Mary as the rest of the domestics. From her Dixon learnt, that the favourite to whom Mrs. Chudleigh had become so strongly attached, and whom she deemed worthy to be the companion of lord Beaufort's daughter, was a very suspicious character; she had been introduced to her lady by Mrs. Richardson, whose little girls took lessons in music of her; but Mrs. Richardson, she believed, was very glad to get rid of her: for her part, indeed, she had no patience with such sort of people, who set themselves up to be gentlewomen, and were often no better than they should be; she

passed, indeed, for the *aunt* of the little boy, whom she had the boldness to bring one day to see her lady; but *she*, somehow or other, suspected that the child was her own: she had seen old Mrs. Byron, who looked a very odd sort of person, and who ought, at her time of life, to be thinking of something else than countenancing such doings.

Dixon, who had at first taken Mary for some lady of fortune, and consequently paid her great respect, now joined in reviling her, in terms as bitter as if she had done her a personal injury. Hearing the sound of Mrs. Cringewell's bell, she hurried to disclose the important intelligence she had just received, well knowing that such communications were a sure passport to the favour of her mistress.

Nothing could exceed the malignant joy which took possession of Mrs. Cringewell's features on hearing the slanderous tale of her waiting-maid; she even neglected to spend the usual time in deco-

rating her person, that she might hasten to the chamber of lady Victoria before she had quitted it. Her ladyship, however, notwithstanding her natural levity of mind, was too good-natured and too generous to receive any gratification from the illiberal reports of her duenna. "It is all false, you may be assured," said she; "a mere idle tale, raised by some one who is jealous of the beauty and talents of Miss Seymour; the innocency of her manners, and her being so highly esteemed by Maria, prove the falsity of the slanderous part of the rumour; and if she is poor, and wishes to procure a genteel living by teaching music, I really think it does her great credit."

"Ah! your ladyship is so kind, so considerate, always ready to make excuses for faults in others, which you do not possess yourself; well, I only wish that *dear angel*, who is so like you, may not be deceived in Miss Seymour. Poor thing! I bear her no ill will; I would not injure her for the world, poor girl! I pity her if she is falsely accused: but, my dear lady Victo-

ria, I own I was angry at first, because I thought such company not proper for you to keep—you, who are the only daughter of the earl of Beaufort."

"And wife of general Volatile," replied her ladyship, half breathing a sigh. The next moment she added, laughingly—"My dear Cringewell, I had almost forgot to thank you for the care you have always had of my reputation; but in this instance do not be alarmed; it can never suffer from associating with the chosen friend of my dear Maria. What will you do with yourself this morning? Suppose you, out of kindness to Mrs. Chudleigh, just see how the servants are going on; they have but a lazy time of it, I dare say, during her illness: Maria will esteem it a great favour, and when the bill of fare is brought up, you order what you please, that's a good soul."

"Ah, well; but wont sir William wonder what has become of me?"

"I'll make an excuse for you: Miss

Seymour and I are going to practise over some new music after breakfast, and I know you would rather be out of the way."

"I hate music," grumbled Mrs. Cringewell to herself, as she followed her ladyship into the breakfast-parlour.

Mary was not yet arrived, and Mrs. Chudleigh and sir William were impatiently waiting for her: the former had passed a sleepless night, and was feverish and unwell; the fulsome attentions and numerous inquiries of Mrs. Cringewell oppressed her, while the absence of Mary only served to remind her, that her presence had almost become necessary to her existence. Her entrance was greeted with a smile of affection, and the tenderness of Mary's voice and Mary's eyes seemed to revive the languid spirits of Mrs. Chudleigh.

"Bless me!" cried Mrs. Cringewell, "how I envy you, my *dear* Miss Seymour! you are *such* a favourite with my

dear Mrs. Chudleigh, that I really do not think she can live without you."

"Yet I must endeavour to do so," replied the invalid, with a sigh.

"Surely Miss Seymour will go with you to Spain," continued the ever-talkative Mrs. Cringewell.

"I am not so selfish as to request such a thing; Miss Seymour has already, with the greatest disinterestedness, devoted to me the principal part of her time, which is more than I shall ever be able to repay."

Well, if I was you, Miss Seymour, I should certainly go with Mrs. Chudleigh; who knows but that you may be born to be married to a Spanish husband, and become one of the Spanish donnas: I have heard say, sir William, that the Spaniards are dreadfully jealous; I am sure I should not like to have one, though really, if it were not for my *sweet* lady Victoria, I would go with you, my *dear* Mrs. Chudleigh, myself; you don't know what an excellent nurse I am, and what a vast number of *nice* things I can make."

"It would be very unsafe for *you* to venture to Spain," replied sir William, smiling ironically; "for it is certain that the blaze of your beauty would captivate many a Spanish heart, and the consequence would be fatal to some of them; no, no, my lovely Mrs. Cringewell, you do quite mischief enough at home without spreading it abroad."

"After *such* a compliment as *that*," said lady Victoria, "I hope I shall never hear a word against sailors; no landsman could have said a neater thing."

"Sir William has learnt the art of flattery, I perceive," replied the delighted duenna, giving him a look of fond approbation; "*for his sake* I will be more liberal, in future, of my civilities towards gentlemen of his profession."

Lady Victoria now mentioned her intention of going early to town the next morning; and as she seemed extremely anxious for Mary to accompany her, Mrs. Chudleigh seconded her wishes. "The ride will be of service to you, my dear

Mary," said she; "do not hesitate on my account, my love, as I shall be busy with sir William for several hours."

Mary therefore assented to the request of her ladyship, who promised to call and take her up. This settled, they withdrew to the music-room, whither sir William accompanied them; while Mrs. Cringewell stalked off to that of the housekeeper, and from thence into the kitchen, where she soon convinced the servants that, although the daughter of a gentleman, and niece to a baronet, descended from one of the most ancient families in England, she was far, very far from being herself a gentlewoman.

Mrs. Cringewell knew of lady Victoria's intention to go to town, but had meant to decline going, that she might have the opportunity of fooling with sir William, until her ladyship mentioned *calling* on Mary; the idea immediately struck her, that she should then have a chance of seeing the *reputed* nephew of Miss Seymour. This was sufficient even to make her forego the

delight of trifling with sir William, and she therefore got ready the next morning by the same hour as her ladyship.

Before the carriage stopped at Mrs. Sutton's, Mrs. Cringewell proposed that they should go in, and have a peep at Mary's infant charge.

Her ladyship, who doted on children, immediately consented; and leaping gaily out of her carriage, ran into the parlour, where Mary, who saw her alight, and who felt considerable vexation at beholding Mrs. Cringewell, instantly joined them.

"My dear Miss Seymour," cried lady Victoria, "do favour us with one kiss of your little nephew; I got out on purpose to see him."

"Ah do now, *dear* Miss Seymour; we are so fond of children," said Mrs. Cringewell.

Mary, though inwardly chagrined, yet could not with propriety refuse; she therefore returned and fetched the blooming boy, whose beauty attracted even the attention of Mrs. Cringewell; while lady Victoria loaded him with caresses, and in

the delight of fondling him, had nearly forgotten that her carriage was waiting to convey her to town. The curiosity of her companion, however, being gratified, she reminded her ladyship of their intended journey; who, kissing him again and again, promised, as she gave him to Sophy, to bring back with her plenty of cakes and toys for the lovely cherub.

Although the son of Monteith was the exact image of his father, yet Mrs. Cringewell persisted that the child strongly resembled his aunt, and inquired whether his mother was not very like Mary, as any body who saw them might easily tell that they were *very closely related?*

In saying this, she looked full in the face of Mary, who felt the blood rush into her cheeks; till remembering that it was not likely that her disagreeable tormentor had any knowledge of how *very closely* they were related, she assumed courage to reply—" That it was the first time she had ever been told that the slightest resem-

blance subsisted between herself and her nephew."

"I do not see it, I confess," said lady Victoria; "but you are famous for finding out likenesses, Cringewell, that do not exist: he is certainly one of the sweetest boys I ever beheld; and if I were his aunt, I should not like to lose sight of him for a moment."

To the great relief of Mary, who cordially disliked Mrs. Cringewell, she saw her set down at lady Victoria's town-house, and heard, with joy, that she was to remain until their return. The carriage was then ordered to proceed to colonel Mornington's, in Albemarle-street. "I am going to pay a lying-in visit," said her ladyship, "where I shall have one of the greatest treats in the world—that of nursing the baby. It is Mrs. Mornington's first, and I dare say the dear creature will be nearly killed with kindness, as well by the sisters of my friend, as by its mother."

On their alighting, they were met at the

head of the stairs by a tall, elegant young woman, who, after embracing her ladyship, expressed her pleasure at thus unexpectedly seeing her in London, and then hurried her and Mary into the drawing-room, where they were joined by another young lady, whose sweetly-pensive countenance had been too indelibly imprinted on the mind of Mary for her to doubt for an instant whether it was not Delia Fitzroy.

The surprise of Mary at finding herself thus suddenly led into the presence of her cousins, was not greater than that which was visible on the features of Delia, on beholding, as she deemed her, the beloved object of George Fitzroy's affections. She started, turned pale, and with difficulty requested Mary to sit down; while her sister conducted lady Victoria to the bed-chamber of the happy mother.

At length Delia gained courage to inquire if she had not the pleasure of seeing Miss Seymour once before, in company with lieutenant George Fitzroy, at the theatre?

Mary, who too well knew what was passing in the mind of her cousin, and who longed to undeceive her, replied that she perfectly well remembered the evening, as Mr. Fitzroy had mentioned to her his relationship to the lady to whom he had bowed.

"I hope he is well," said Delia, in a confused voice; "perhaps you have heard from him lately? He is a very amiable young man; and as we were brought up together, I cannot help feeling an interest in his welfare, which will account for the inquiry I have just made."

"He was quite well when I last heard from him," said Mary, "and expects to return to England in a short time: the kind inquiry you have made will, I know, be highly gratifying to him."

A faint blush crossed the cheek of Delia; she looked inquisitively in the face of Mary; then casting her eyes on the ground, she said, in a tremulous accent—"Mr. Fitzroy, since he quitted my father's house, has made new friendships, which I

fear have quite obliterated those of his early years; are you acquainted, Miss Seymour, with his sister? I am sure she must be amiable; I have always loved her, and always lamented that family-circumstances prevented my telling her so."

"In her name I thank you," replied Mary, gratefully, "and can assure you that, although she is debarred the happiness of your society, she feels for *you* the regard of a sister; and on your account alone, will ever regret that false pride which has made you strangers to each other."

The eyes of Delia now sparkled with delight. "Dear Miss Seymour!" said she, rising hastily, and taking from the table a pair of scissars, with which she cut from her head a ringlet of hair, "will you have the kindness to present to my cousin Mary this trifling pledge of my affection? Tell her it comes from one who loves her dearly; and who, if she dared, would fly to assure her of it personally."

Mary, overcome by the artless and ge-

nuine affection of her amiable cousin, could not resist an opportunity which might never again occur; she pressed the paper to her lips which contained the hair of Delia; and then placing it in her bosom, she untied her bonnet, and cutting off one of the bright curls that adorned her head, she presented it to the astonished Delia, saying—"Receive, dearest Delia, from Mary herself a similar pledge: how little did I imagine, on entering this house, that I should have the happiness of seeing one who is not *too proud* to acknowledge in her heart her relationship to the sister of George Fitzroy."

Delia in a moment clasped her arms round the neck of Mary, and kissing her affectionately, repeated over and over again her long-cherished regard, and the additional pleasure she now felt, at having it in her power to see and assure her of her sentiments in her favour. "Ah!" said she, colouring deeply, "I little dreamed that you were the *sister* of George: when I first saw you at the theatre, his atten-

tions to you were those of a lover; and as such I have ever since regarded him: dear, dear Mary, I am so transported, I scarce know what I say; yet why were you introduced to me as *Miss Seymour*?"

This simple question broke the fairy spell which held the thoughts of Mary in visionary rapture; a sigh of bitter recollection escaped her—"My dear Delia," said she, while the starting tear dimmed the lustre of her eyes, "that is the only name by which I am known to lady Victoria; circumstances compel me, for a time, to drop my own: should we meet again, you shall know the unhappy cause; until then, remember that I am *Miss Seymour*."

"Ah, my dear cousin! and are *you* unhappy? Ah me! what would I give to have the power to alleviate any distress of yours! My dear father has been dead nearly twelve months, and my mother, whose health is fast declining, urges me to marry lord Bodmyn, that she may see me well settled during her lifetime; if I

thought, Mary, that you would ever be persuaded to come and reside with me, and consider my house as your own, I should not feel quite so much reluctance to obey my mother's wishes."

Mary again embraced the affectionate girl, and thanked her for this fresh proof of her esteem. "On no account, my dear cousin," said she, "allow yourself to be persuaded to bestow your hand, unless your heart accompanies it; the tenderness of your disposition would not permit you to be happy with a man whom you did not prefer to every other."

Delia blushed deeply, then turned pale. "I will flatter myself," said she, "that this unexpected interview is only the prelude to many others; should I be so fortunate as to see you again, I will repose that confidence in your affection and honour which I have not done to either of my sisters: hark! I hear Elizabeth's foot; dear and ever-beloved Mary, one more embrace; do not forget me—my heart is yours."

Mary returned the friendly pressure

with a warmth of feeling, a vivacity of manner, that reminded Delia of the absent George, and made his sister doubly dear to her. "Remember," cried Mary, hastily, "that I am Miss Seymour." The entrance of lady Victoria and Miss Fitzroy prevented her saying more.

"I beg pardon, Miss Seymour," said her ladyship, "for staying so long; but I have been so much engaged in nursing, that I quite forgot the hour. Dear Delia, you look better than when I last saw you; how is Bodmyn? any nearer his felicity than he was two months ago? nay, no blushing, Delia, or I shall think you really mean to have him."

"To be sure she does," said Elizabeth, gaily; "I tell my mother that it is not quite fair that Delia should be married before me, and that she should be greeted with the title of 'your ladyship,' while Sarah is plain Mrs. Mornington; and I and Barbara perhaps are destined to become old maids; I wish lord Bodmyn would have me instead of Delia."

"You are quite welcome to him, Elizabeth," said her sister, gravely.

"Thank you, thank you!" replied Elizabeth, laughing; "but I am not so certain that his lordship will agree to the transfer."

"Upon my word," cried lady Victoria, in her usual careless manner, "I know not what to think of you, Delia; this indifference to become the wife of a lord is truly surprising: many a girl at your age would be glad to have the same good offer: but come, Miss Seymour, I have many places to call at; and poor Cringewell will think I have quite forgotten her."

"Stay, Victoria; you have not told us how long you mean to remain in town," said Elizabeth.

"Not longer than a week," replied her ladyship; "I then return to my father's. I wish it were possible to persuade Maria to give up her mad voyage, and accompany me to Beaufort House; we have got such a delightful party there, you would be enchanted to make one among them."

"How unfortunate that the *general* should be now absent," said Delia.

"Rather so," replied her ladyship, with the same gaiety; "but, my dear girls, if you can any how make Hampstead one of your morning rides, you know how happy I shall be to see you."

The eyes of Delia and Mary met; they understood each other.

"We will endeavour to call before you leave town," said Elizabeth.

"You may depend upon seeing us, if possible," cried Delia, squeezing the hand of Mary, who now followed lady Victoria down stairs, pleased with the hope that she should have another opportunity of speaking to the amiable and affectionate Delia.

Her ladyship, who had several purchases to make, as well for herself as for her sister-in-law, did not forget to buy a variety of toys and cakes, &c. for the nephew of Miss Seymour.

Mary, though grateful at this shew of

kindness towards one so dear to her, could not help being surprised at the thoughtless manner in which lady Victoria squandered away her money, without ever seeming to consider, for a moment, that one quarter of what she was thus wantonly parting with, on a variety of articles which she owned she was not in want of, would perhaps be the means of saving an industrious family from ruin: yet lady Victoria was not deficient in humanity or generosity, as Mary saw her give, with the same careless profusion, to every beggar that made an appeal to her charity.

"Alas!" thought Mary, "here is a disposition to work upon; in the mind and heart of lady Victoria are the seeds of every virtue: they are too luxuriant; they need the prudent hand of a cultivator to restrain their growth. What a different woman would she have been, had circumstances allowed of her being directed by such a brother as sir William! How must he mourn in secret to behold the sister for whom he expressed such tender interest

some years ago, now grown up to womanhood, not only thoughtless of the present moment, but equally careless as to the future! How, also, would his sympathizing nature lament my untimely fate! fallen as I am from the pinnacle of all earthly felicity, and even obliged to conceal the name of the family to whom I belong, lest some one should hold up the finger of censure, and exclaim as I pass by—'There goes Mary Fitzroy; her vanity and credulity have met with their punishment: she thought herself the *wife* of the handsomest man of the age; she was only his mistress."

The stoppage of the carriage at the door of lady Victoria's house recalled the wandering thoughts of Mary, who felt more and more disinclined for the company of Mrs. Cringewell, who now joined them. Fortunately however for her, she had so much to say to lady Victoria, so many inquiries to make about what she had bought and whom she had seen, that Mary had leisure to reflect on the unexpected pleasure she had received in her interview

with her cousin, who she now, more than ever, felt anxious to have become the wife of her brother.

Lady Victoria, although it was already the hour of dinner, persisted in calling at Mary's lodgings, contrary to the advice of Mrs. Cringewell, who was certain that every thing would be spoiled, and that she should not be able to touch a morsel. Notwithstanding her ill-humour, which became every instant more visible on her frowning countenance, her giddy ladyship got out of the carriage to present with her own hand her numerous presents to the lovely boy; while Mrs. Cringewell, taking Mary by the arm, almost compelled her to walk across the heath, leaving the carriage to bring home the good-natured offender. Had she not feared to offend Mary, by gratifying her own inclinations without leave, her ladyship would have carried her blooming favourite with her to Mrs. Chudleigh's; but as Mrs. Byron, whom she now saw, advised her to postpone her wish, she at length quitted

him with reluctance, and hurried home, where she found that, as Mrs. Cringewell had predicted, the dinner was nearly all spoiled, and her duenna, of course, highly displeased with her, for having lost any time with the nephew of Miss Seymour, to whom she could not help extending her malignity, as the innocent cause of her ladyship's detention.

CHAPTER VII.

THE first sound which greeted the ears of Mary, on entering the dining-parlour, was the voice of Mrs. Cringewell, who, in accents of real distress, was apologizing to Mrs. Chudleigh for having kept the dinner waiting; every thing was too much done—every thing was spoiled; she was sure her *dear* friend would not be able to touch a morsel; really lady Victoria was much to blame in calling at the cottage,

as that made another hour's delay: neither Mrs. Chudleigh, *dear, sweet soul!* nor sir William, would be able to pick out a dinner; they certainly had every reason to feel extremely offended at being thus deprived of one of their most pleasant meals; it was inexcusable of them to have staid so late.

Mrs. Chudleigh begged of Mrs. Cringewell not to distress herself so severely on her account, as it was impossible to be always exact to the hour; and she was certain that sir William would readily excuse the loss of his dinner, if the occasion of it had afforded any gratification to his sister.

"Oh William!" cried lady Victoria, "if you were but to see Miss Seymour's little nephew, you would only wonder how I could leave him; he is the most lovely boy I have ever beheld: every movement of his limbs has a peculiar grace, and his laugh is perfectly enchanting; positively, Miss Seymour, I believe that I shall steal him away from you; he has already

made the conquest of one female heart; and should he grow up to fulfil the promise of his childhood, he will well deserve the title of the handsomest man of the age."

Mary gave a sudden start; it was the name by which she had first known his father. Her emotion was visible to all present; to none more than to Mrs. Cringewell. "Bless me!" she exclaimed, "what has come to Miss Seymour? Pray, sir William, give her this smelling bottle; I fear she is going to faint."

"Are you unwell, my dear Mary?" said Mrs. Chudleigh, with anxiety.

"I am better now," replied Mary; "it was only a sudden pain shot through my head."

"Never mind if it was not through your heart, my dear girl," replied the eternal talker; "I really thought it was owing to something that her ladyship had said about your little nephew: do you know, sir William that the child is as like Miss Seymour as if he were her own."

Again Mary became agitated; but recovered on hearing lady Victoria say—"Indeed you must excuse me, if I deny the truth of that assertion, Cringewell: what do *you* think, Maria? you have seen my little lover, have you not?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Chudleigh, who felt pained at the situation of Mary; "I have seen Miss Seymour's nephew, and could not discover the least resemblance between them."

"Were I permitted," said sir William, "I should feel highly flattered if Miss Seymour would allow me to form my own judgment on the important subject of Mrs. Cringewell's taste; it has been called in question by two ladies, and I really think that it remains with me to decide between them."

As usual, Mrs. Cringewell's vanity led her to imagine that he meant to compliment her; smiling, as she thought most bewitchingly, she nodded to him familiarly, and begged that sir William might be indulged with a sight of the child, for she

was sure that he would agree with her concerning the resemblance.

Mary replied that she could certainly have no objection to grant the request of sir William; but that she was perfectly convinced that, in this instance at least, he would differ in opinion from Mrs. Cringewell."

"I feel impatient to be satisfied on the point," said sir William, gaily; "is it possible, Miss Seymour, to have my curiosity gratified this evening?"

"If you have no particular objection, my dear Mary," said Mrs. Chudleigh, "Thomas shall go and fetch your nephew: yet stay; had you not better write a line to Mrs. Byron?"

"I almost think it is too late to bring him out," replied Mary, fearfully.

"I think so likewise," cried lady Victoria; "but if Miss Seymour will give us leave, William and I will just run over to the cottage, and take a peep at him before he goes to bed."

Mary, who knew that her sweet boy

was equally handsome in his night-clothes as when dressed, immediately consented; and her ladyship, followed by her brother, ran out of the room, exulting at the idea of convincing him of the falsity of her duenna's report.

Mrs. Cringewell, who was seized with a *sudden* pain in her stomach, which, unfortunately for her, occurred now very frequently, retired to the housekeeper's room for a cordial, which, as the want of it was anticipated, was already prepared for her.

"My dear Mary," said Mrs. Chudleigh, as soon as they were alone, "the impertinence and low-bred vulgarity of that woman is as distressing to you as to myself; it is a misery to me to be obliged to sit in her presence: what an example of indelicacy and levity for Victoria, were she inclined to follow it! I am perfectly convinced that Mrs. Cringewell is more willing to wink at any impropriety which she might be guilty of, (providing that Victoria did not interfere with *her own amours*), than to caution or advise her to the con-

trary: William is seriously alarmed lest his sister's character should suffer from being always seen in the company of Mrs. Cringewell, as well as lest her morals should receive a taint from those of her duenna."

"I cannot help acknowledging that I am equally disgusted as yourself," replied Mary; the freedom of Mrs. Cringewell's conversation, dress, and looks, must be unpleasing to a man of sir William's delicate taste; nor do I wonder at his fears respecting lady Victoria; for certainly never was there a more improper companion for youth and beauty than Mrs. Cringewell; I am sure that she has taken a dislike to me, from some cause or other, as she watches every movement of mine, and looks so malignantly while she persists that I am like my dear boy."

"Such are my fears also," said the fair invalid; "it is enough that you have acquired the esteem of sir William to make her your decided enemy; and the singularity of one so young being left in care

of an infant nephew, seems unfortunately to afford her a good pretext for insinuating that he is more closely related to you: but fear not, beloved Mary; the poisonous shafts of calumny, which are thrown by Mrs. Cringewell, will fall blunted to the ground: a few days will rid you of her offensive presence; and, thank Heaven! she has lost the power to injure you in the opinion of William, whose friendship I have the satisfaction of knowing is yours. As he becomes more intimately acquainted with you, my dear Mary, his excellent qualities will gradually insure to him your confidence. Disappointed in his first affections by the untimely death of my beloved sister, I do not think it probable that he will ever marry; his disposition is naturally serious; constant in his opinions, warm and steady in his attachments, strictly just and honourable in all his actions, he is a friend of sterling worth; he is a man to whom I can confide even you, my young and handsome Mary; he is one whose knowledge

and advice may, at a future time, be of service to you."

Mary sighed deeply; the remembrance of his disinterested counsels, given to her when she was barely fourteen, crossed her mind: she had not mentioned to the invalid the circumstance of her early friend; neither had she been able to inform her of the unexpected meeting with Delia: to do this she must necessarily betray her real name, and she therefore denied herself the pleasure of communicating to Mrs. Chudleigh their interview.

Lady Victoria and her brother were now returned, and with them came the duenna. The latter had been chatting with the housekeeper, and had been induced to take an *additional* glass of cordial, probably on account of the *additional* pain in her stomach that evening. "Well, my *dear* sir William," said she, catching hold of his arm, and looking languishingly in his face, "are you not of my opinion? Is not the boy as like Miss Seymour as if he were her own child?"

Sir William looked at her for a moment with surprise: disgusted at the boldness of her eyes and the freedom of her manner, he coldly replied—"That he he certainly was not of *her* opinion; as never were two countenances more unlike than those of Miss Seymour and her nephew." He then turned from her, and walked towards the couch, on which Mary and Mrs. Chudleigh were seated. Placing himself between them, he took both their hands, and pressing them gently, said—"Congeniality of sentiment and kindred excellence bind you to each other." Then lowering his voice—"Would to God that my sister was as fortunate in her friends as my dear Maria, or that she had such a protector and companion as Mrs. Byron; the old lady has quite captivated me, Miss Seymour."

Mary, delighted by the opportunity of praising her maternal friend, replied to him in terms of animated gratitude: she seemed as if she could never sufficiently extol the wisdom, prudence, and affection of her

venerable monitress, whose appearance had thus strongly prepossessed sir William in her favour; the tenderness of her feelings, and the exhilarating subject she was so eloquently conversing on, overcame the natural diffidence of her disposition, while it heightened the loveliness of her countenance, and made her more like what she was when sir William first knew her. A tinge of melancholy pervaded his features, as she now most forcibly brought to his recollection the sweet little girl to whom he had so instantaneously become attached. Mary caught a glance of his eyes; they were full of tender meaning, which none present, except herself, could translate: blushing, she cast her own on the ground, and became silent.

"To be thus praised, thus beloved," cried sir William, raising her hand to his lips, "is a sufficient inducement to become your friend; dear Miss Seymour, I feel that it is necessary for me to attempt, at least, to gain so enviable a distinction."

Mrs. Cringewell, who was complete-

to partake of her own virtues, and therefore cannot fail of being regarded by me with esteem and admiration; I only wish that the beautiful boy I saw this evening was old enough to be confided to my care; how delighted I should be to patronize and bring forward the nephew of Miss Seymour!"

Mary's eyes thanked him for the kindness of his wish.

"You forget that he has a father to be consulted, William," said her ladyship, "and that he may have already destined his lovely son to some other profession."

"True," replied sir William, thoughtfully. "Be that as it may, I shall always, I am confident, feel an interest in the fate of Miss Seymour's nephew."

Sir William and Mrs. Chudleigh now sat down to chess. Mrs. Cringewell made a second retreat to the housekeeper's room to order something which she wished for supper, but more to vent her spleen against sir William and Mary, which she did in no very delicate terms, calling her an

artful hussy, who, she was certain, was no better than she should be, and who, she felt assured in her own mind, was the real mother of that boy whom there was such a fuss about. The waiting-maid of Mrs. Chudleigh now freely declared *her* opinions, which were the same as Mrs. Cringewell's; and the character of poor Mary was thus torn to pieces in the housekeeper's room, while she, unconscious of what was passing, was innocently employed in accompanying lady Victoria in some duets on the harp.

Sir William and Mrs. Chudleigh became equally inattentive to the game; both stopped, as if by mutual consent, at the sound of Mary's mellow voice. She was singing the ballad of "Eveleen's Bower;" and as she sung the last stanza, in a tremulous, yet beautiful tone, it thrilled the hearts of sir William and Mrs. Chudleigh, the latter of whom too well imagined what was passing in the mind of the injured performer, as she repeated the following lines—

"But there's a light above, which alone can remove
That stain upon the snow of fair Eveleen's fame."

The blush of disappointed pride, of wounded love, deepened the faded rose that tinged the fair cheek of Mary.

"Exquisite!" cried lady Victoria. "Oh, you have enchanted me, Miss Seymour! do have the goodness to sing it over again, that I may endeavour to catch your style: I have heard it before, but then it did not strike me as being any thing very particular."

Mary immediately complied, and threw in some fresh graces which had the merit of not spoiling the simplicity of the original melody. Sir William could not refrain from testifying the admiration he felt; and Mary was well rewarded for the exertion she had made by the consciousness that, should she ever become *known* to him, she would not disgrace the opinion he had formed of her early talents.

"I do not think you are fond of the Scotch music, Miss Seymour," said her ladyship; "for I have never heard you

play any; and yet can there be a sweeter song than—"O Nannie, wilt thou gang with me?"

"I am extremely partial to that song," replied her brother; "and if Miss Seymour will play it, I will endeavour to do all the justice in my power to the sentiments of the poet."

"You must excuse me, indeed," said Mary, pale as death, and trembling with agitation; "I know not the tune."

"It is here, Miss Seymour," cried her ladyship, as she ran her light fingers over the keys of the instrument.

"Come, Miss Seymour," said sir William, taking her hand, "will you not oblige me?"

"I cannot, indeed I cannot," exclaimed Mary, withdrawing it hastily, and with a look so painfully embarrassed, that sir William viewed her with surprise. "I never play the Scotch songs," she added, in still greater confusion.

Sir William, who thought it impossible that she should dislike what every person

of taste allowed to be beautiful, could only attribute her disinclination to oblige him to a fear, perhaps, of his inability to accompany her performance. Dropping her hand, he coldly bowed, and requested his sister to play the song he wished; while Mrs. Chudleigh, amazed at the conduct of Mary, beckoned to her to take her seat beside her on the sofa.

Sir William possessed a fine, clear, manly voice, which, though it wanted the magical sweetness of Donald Monteith's, was well calculated to breathe forth all the genuine feeling of the inspired writer. Mary found herself unable to listen to the song which Monteith had so frequently sung to her; the tears rushed into her eyes, and her whole frame became convulsed, even to agony.

Mrs. Chudleigh, alarmed, took her hand; "Retire with me, dearest Mary," said she; "I see that you are unwell." Saying this she led her out of the apartment to her own bed-room, where, fastening the door, that they might not be disturbed, she

pressed the agitated girl to her breast. 'Relieve yourself, my dear friend; weep freely on my bosom; you cannot lean on one that loves you more sincerely."

Mary, when a little recovered, apologized for the weakness she had betrayed, and candidly owned the cause.

"I feared as much," replied the amiable invalid; "and that you may be spared the pain of noticing it again to sir William or Victoria, I will account for your not being able to play the Scotch airs in a manner satisfactory to them and agreeable to yourself."

"And I," said Mary, "as it is now late, will return home, if you will have the goodness to make my excuses to them also."

Mrs. Chudleigh, though more and more unwilling to lose an hour of Mary's society, assented to this proposal. Embracing her affectionately, she returned to the drawing-room; where, notwithstanding that the pride of sir William was offended,

he anxiously inquired the cause of Miss Seymour's absence. He no sooner learnt that she was unwell, and that her indisposition arose from the revival of some painful recollection, which had been called forth by hearing the favourite song of a deceased friend, than his displeasure vanished, and his heart swelled with tenderness and sympathy towards Mary.

"I thought it impossible," said he, "that a mind like hers could be insensible to the charms of Scottish music: sweet girl! how dearly must she have loved that friend to be so deeply affected by a song! Do you know, Maria, if it was a lady to whom Miss Seymour was so strongly attached?"

"Is that a fair question, William?" said his sister.

"Perhaps not, Victoria: from any other man it might be deemed an insolent one; but Maria has drawn largely on my friendship for her friend; she has excited a degree of interest in my bosom, which makes

the question I have just asked neither unnatural nor impertinent."

"And I will answer it, William, as far as I may, without infringing on the confidence my lovely friend has reposed in me. The youth and merits of Mary have not exempted her from sufferings, which, however, are by no means common: it has pleased the Almighty to try her severely, to deprive her of a relation whom she loved with romantic enthusiasm, and whose memory will ever be held sacred, while every thing that recalls him to her recollection, has power to affect her, as you have seen: she has been singularly unfortunate; yet I hope, I trust, that her future years will still afford her some ray of hope, some cherished treasure, that will make her life become once more of value to herself."

"Dear! dear! how sorry I am to hear that Miss Seymour is unhappy!" cried lady Victoria; "I declare I had no idea that one so young could have met with any

thing to blight the opening bud of happy expectation: Miss Seymour is, however, *single*; she at least possesses the power of sweetening the bitter cup of disappointment, by exerting the freedom of her choice in a partner for life. The loss of her parents, although a severe misfortune, yet left her at liberty to make her own election, and happiness may yet be hers: she has my best wishes: has she not yours, my brother?"

Sir William started as from a reverie; his eyes were humid, as well as those of lady Victoria, who, notwithstanding her natural or assumed levity, did not want feeling when any thing occurred to call it forth. "Yes, Victoria," said he, as he tenderly kissed her cheek; "Miss Seymour has my *best* wishes: what a companion would she be for you, instead of that medley of vulgarity, ignorance, and wanton vanity, to whose care the general has consigned you! My blood boils with indignation when I reflect on the gross imprudence he has thus committed, in giving

to you a woman whose conversation and whose freedom of manners must often call a blush on your cheek. Let the house of your father, my dear sister, become your principal residence during the absence of your husband; I must, however, write to him upon the subject; it is of too much importance to be neglected: the more I see of Mrs. Cringewell, the more I am convinced that she would not hesitate to make the first advances to *any* man."

"Oh fie, William!" exclaimed her ladyship; "how severe you are against poor Cringewell! I certainly do not like her, and should rejoice at being free from her eternal talkativeness; but, upon my word, I do not think so badly of her as you do, though I confess that she has very often put me to confusion when she has been conversing with the friends of the general who call occasionally at my house: still, as he has thought proper to assign to her a place at his table, and to desire her to continue with me while he is abroad, I

should not like to offend him by any mark of disrespect to his wishes."

"Dear Victoria," replied sir William, throwing his arms affectionately round her, "may you ever pay the same praiseworthy attention to the desires of the general as you do at this moment! obedience in a wife is a virtue which cannot be too much extolled: I know little of your husband but by report, yet I hope that he will set a proper value upon your forbearance: the honour of my family must not, however, be tarnished by the breath of slander; even your innocence, Victoria, will not shield you from the ill-natured remarks of the censorious, nor guard you against the artifices of my sex, who may feel authorised to attempt the virtue of a woman that could tolerate, as a friend, such a being as Mrs. Cringewell."

"Dear William, do not look grave, nor think thus severely of my duenna; I am certain that she would never advise me to act imprudently, if I were so inclined; her

partiality to yourself should lead you to be more lenient to her failings."

"Victoria, the purity of your own mind ill accords with the general giddiness of your manners; yet that it is pure and spotless I feel assured; but beware how you place any confidence in the professions of Mrs. Cringewell; she is a character too deep, too designing, for you to fathom: your rank in life is alone sufficient to procure you the appearance of her friendship; it is your title, not yourself, that wins her disgusting servility; while her affected partiality for me (a partiality to which every fresh face gives birth) only renders her a still greater object of my aversion: let me not hear you again attempt, Victoria, to gloss over the faults of that woman, or I shall become still more alarmed on your account, lest you should accustom yourself to think lightly of *failings* which border too closely on what may justly be termed *vices* in your sex."

"I think as you do of Mrs. Cringewell,' said the invalid; "and am happy, Wil-

liam, to find that you mean to interfere on the subject: but allow me to say that your application should first be made to your father, who will be the best person to remonstrate with the general, and gain the dismissal of his ill-judged confidant: in the mean time, be assured that Victoria's affection for her husband is the best guardian of her own virtue and his honour."

Her ladyship for a moment looked thoughtful; a half-suppressed sigh escaped her. It was heard by her brother, whose countenance instantly resumed its natural sweetness; again his arms encircled her, as in a voice of tender anxiety he inquired what could have power to call forth a sigh from a bosom so free from care?

Lady Victoria coloured as she felt the necessity of uttering a falsehood; she attributed it to the serious conversation of her brother, for she dared not hint to him that, all happy as she seemed, and, to appearance, free from even the semblance of a care, yet in secret she had a grief which, when she was alone, would often call forth

the sigh of blighted hope, the tear of vain regret. The affectionate caresses and brotherly love of sir William soon, however, recalled the ready smile to the cheerful countenance of her ladyship; and the short-lived sigh was quickly forgotten by all but the watchful guardian of a sister's happiness.

No sooner had sir William retired for the night, than he sat down to write to lord Beaufort on the subject of Mrs. Cringewell's removal, and entreated his father not to delay making the necessary application. This done, he consoled himself with the hope that the morals and manners of his sister would escape the contaminating influence of her companion, and that the general would not lose a moment in making such arrangements as would render the presence of Mrs. Cringewell no longer requisite. "Alas!" he exclaimed, rising and pacing the chamber, "while I am thus anxiously solicitous to preserve the character of my sister free from ble-

mish, who shall watch over that of the lovely Miss Seymour? who shall guard that angel form from danger? who shall speak peace to her wounded mind, and supply the place of that friend so beloved, so lamented? And thou too, my early love—my beautiful, my innocent, my confiding Mary! what part of the globe dost thou now inhabit? Hast thou forgotten him who made the first impression on thy virgin heart? him who first stampt on thy sweet lips the seal of love; and who, had he dared, would have pledged to thee his heart? Where art thou, Mary, still beloved, still remembered with a sigh? Am I then fated never to behold thee more? Yet how singular, how incomprehensible, that chance should bring to my knowledge a being such as I should deem thy very counterpart, had affliction, which, Heaven forbid! robbed thee of thy enchanting vivacity, and stole from thy cheek its blushing roses! Ah! I too well comprehend the internal agitation which I feel at the sight of Miss Seymour, whose

features, nay, whose very name, remind me of my little friend: I have nothing to dread from the interest she has excited in my breast; I need not seek to damp the tenderness which her unprotected youth and beauty call forth; Maria has claimed for her my friendship, and should even a softer sentiment pervade my soul, and the second Mary become as dear as the first, am I not now my own master, and free to gratify my inclinations?"

He stopped short; a feeling of exultation warmed his breast, a ray of hope, of happiness, darted across his sight; it was succeeded, however, by the chilling gloom of suspicion; the mysterious situation of Mary—her private sorrows—her little charge, on whom she doted with idolatrous affection—her recent agony at the repetition of a favourite song, all conspired to alarm the sensitive mind of sir William. He rang his bell hastily for his attendant, determined no longer to give way to feelings which, in the present state of things, might only add to his secret melancholy;

since, however tenderly his heart might beat for the image of his little friend, the honour of his family was too sacred to him to be tarnished by introducing into it a person of doubtful character.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE increasing debility of Mrs. Chudleigh, which became hourly more and more visible, gave the most serious alarm to Mary, sir William, and his sister. The latter had only one day more to pass with the amiable invalid, who, on the morning of the third, intended to begin her journey, and travel by easy stages to Plymouth, near which was situated the magnificent abode of her guardian, baron D'Eresby.

The ever-lively features of lady Victoria were now clouded by sorrow; she was on the eve of parting with a friend she highly

esteemed—a friend whose delicate health made it almost certain they would never meet again. The melancholy depicted on her face found its way to the hearts of Mary and sir William; the spirits of the former sunk in proportion as the time approached which was to separate her from Mrs. Chudleigh; it was in vain that sir William urged her to eat, or reminded her that her tea still remained untouched. The vacant seat of Mrs. Chudleigh, who had for the first morning excused herself from meeting them at breakfast, reminded Mary of the fearful weakness which had compelled her to remain so much longer than usual in her own room. Lady Victoria had also lost her appetite; but Mrs. Cringewell, whose tongue ran with unabated swiftness, although *unwell*, and *deeply* affected by the idea of parting with her *dear, sweet friend*, still contrived to swallow down three new-laid eggs and a round of toast, declaring that she had scarce closed her eyes all night for thinking of *poor, dear* Mrs. Chudleigh.

All present were too much occupied by their own thoughts to pay much attention to the loquacity of Mrs. Cringewell. Sir William and his sister, followed by Mary, were leaving the breakfast-parlour, when she caught the arm of the pensive girl, and begged that she would allow her a few minutes' conversation.

Mary, though vexed at being prevented from going to visit the invalid, nevertheless returned at the desire of the eternal talker, who, taking her hand and kissing it fervently, exclaimed—"Dearest, sweetest Miss Seymour! I am almost broken-hearted at leaving that *angel* of a woman; oh, when shall I meet with her equal?" She then wiped her eyes with her cambric handkerchief. "Never, never in this world shall I find another Mrs. Chudleigh! *Dear soul! dear creature!* I should feel myself proud and happy by night and by day to work for her, even to be her servant, so that I could always be near her! *Dear* Miss Seymour, could you not contrive to get me something that

belonged to her, an old shoe, or any thing that once was worn by her? I should treasure it sacredly, and never part with what belonged to my *dear, sweet, angelic* Mrs. Chudleigh. Oh dear!" she continued, sobbing aloud, "oh dear! and shall I never see her any more?"

Mary, who had listened with surprise to the singular conversation, and still more singular request of Mrs. Cringewell, gazed on her in silence, until the *deeply-afflicted mourner* withdrew from her face the handkerchief, whose lily whiteness was stained by the streaks of carmine which the tears had washed from her cheeks.

"Now *dear* Miss Seymour! honey Mary! will you find me something belonging to that *angelic* sufferer? I care not what it is."

Mary could hardly repress her contempt at this affected shew of fondness, from *such* a woman as the one before her, towards a being so pure and delicate in mind and manners as Mrs. Chudleigh. Turning to her, with a look of irony, she said—"I am

certain, madam, that if you apply to my friend's waiting-woman, she will allow you to make your own choice of any cast-off article belonging to her mistress."

"You do not mean to insult me, Miss Seymour, surely?"

"Nay, madam; I was only putting you in the way to obtain your wish."

"Well, then, if you advise me to do so, I will go directly to Mrs. Nelson, and ask her for some trifle: were it not for my *dear* lady Victoria, I would offer my services to attend Mrs. Chudleigh to Spain: *sweet angel!* what a comfort it would be to her to have such a clever woman as myself about her person! how I should divert her mind with my amusing stories, and how nicely I could make any little delicacy to entice her to eat! I wonder, Miss Seymour, that you do not go with her to Spain; I know that Mrs. Nelson would be very glad to stay behind, if you would take her place; and really I think it would be a comfortable situation for a young woman of no fortune; only, to be

sure, you don't like to leave your little nephew."

'Indignation crimsoned the face and bosom of Mary at this fresh proof of vulgar insolence; her eyes flashed fire; but remembering that the object before her was beneath her anger, she merely said, while a smile of contempt played around her beautiful mouth—"How much I am obliged to you, my *dear* Mrs. Cringewell, for your good wishes! nay, for those of Mrs. Nelson: yet I am, somehow or other, very much afraid that I should but ill supply her place, since, from having been the confidential friend and bosom-companion of her mistress, and from being unfortunately possessed of talents and connexions which place me upon an equality with Mrs. Chudleigh, I really think that I am not *quite* so *fit* a person to fill the situation of lady's maid, as your partial goodness leads you to suppose."

Saying this, Mary quitted the breakfast-parlour, leaving Mrs. Cringewell asto-

nished at the spirit she had shewn, and half inclined to believe that she had been misinformed respecting her. She nevertheless hastened to the housekeeper's room, to whom, as well as to Mrs. Nelson, she repeated what had passed; not, however, forgetting to beg from her a something which had belonged to her *dear* Mrs. Chudleigh; and she actually made choice of a pair of easy shoes, which she said she should look on with veneration, and only wear when her feet were particularly affected by the weather.

The blush of offended pride still lingered on the cheek of Mary when she entered the apartment of the invalid. Sir William and his sister were sitting, in evident dejection, on each side of the couch on which she reposed. A smile of ineffable sweetness enlivened her features on the approach of Mary. "What has detained you so long below, my dear girl?" said Mrs. Chudleigh. "I fear that tiresome creature Cringewell has been tor-

menting you with her nonsense; I am the more angry with her, as I cannot afford now to lose an hour of your society."

Mary's eyes beamed with melancholy tenderness as she placed herself on a foot-stool before the invalid, and taking her transparent hand in hers, pressed it affectionately to her lips.

Thinking to divert their thoughts from the painful subject of departure, Mary now repeated the handsome compliment she had just been paid by Mrs. Cringewell.

"She is mad! quite mad!" said lady Victoria, with evident chagrin.

"She is worse than mad," cried sir William, angrily; "but I rejoice to see that Miss Seymour treats her with the contempt she merits."

"Mary's understanding is superior to being wounded by the low-bred insolence of such a woman," said the invalid: "the beauty and merits of my friend have naturally excited the malignant jealousy of Mrs. Cringewell; but here, Mary, here she has not the power to harm you: may

all your enemies be as powerless as Mrs. Cringewell!"

"I should have thought," said sir William, expressively, "that Miss Seymour could have no enemies; that the breast of every human being that beheld her would be inspired with one sentiment, that of friendship."

"Or love!" cried lady Victoria. "Why, my brother, did you omit a passion which, if I may judge from my own feelings, she is well calculated to call forth?"

Sir William was silent; but it was not the difference of opinion that prevented his replying to her ladyship; it was the fear that if he did, he should betray more than he wished to be known to any but himself. Fortunately the entrance of a servant relieved him from the embarrassment which he felt, and he withdrew with his sister to the drawing-room to receive the two youngest daughters of lady Sarah Fitzroy.

Mary, on hearing the name of her cousins, could not repress the anxiety she felt to behold again the gentle Delia; and on

Mrs. Chudleigh's inquiring the cause of it, she replied that she would explain it to her the first opportunity; but that she wished it were possible for her to procure a few minutes' private conversation with the youngest Miss Fitzroy.

Although ill able to bear the fatigue of receiving company, Mrs. Chudleigh immediately rose, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Mary, and taking the arm of her watchful friend, descended to the drawing-room.

The eyes of Delia instantly met those of her cousin, whose hand she contrived to press as she assisted her in supporting the invalid to a seat. After a few minutes had elapsed, during which time Mrs. Chudleigh addressed herself chiefly to Delia, she asked, in a low voice, if her sister was fond of birds? to which Delia replied in the negative: then, in a louder one, she put the same question to Delia herself, and requested Mary to have the goodness to shew Miss Delia Fitzroy her collection.

Mary, who now comprehended the kind intention of her friend, joyfully arose; and followed by her cousin, hastened to the room appropriated for an aviary.

"How rejoiced I am to see you again!" exclaimed Delia; "how delightful this opportunity of speaking to you unobserved! I almost feared that we should not be able to call on lady Victoria, as my sister Sarah has been much indisposed since I saw you; but let us not lose a minute; dearest Mary, I have brought with me a little present, which I hope you will wear for my sake."

She then gave into the hand of Mary a brooch set round with emeralds, in the centre of which was a small lock of her own hair. "See," said she, opening her pelisse, "I have had yours, my dear Mary, set in the same manner: my mother and sisters think it is the hair of the young lady to whom Charles is going to be married; how little do they imagine that it belongs to you, my dear cousin!"

"What little treasure lies concealed

within this golden heart, my dear Delia?" inquired Mary, looking archly in her face; "is it the hair of lord Bodmyn?"

"No, indeed," replied Delia, blushing deeply; "it is that of an absent friend, a single hair of whose head is more sacred to me than the whole person of his lordship: yet," added she, with a sigh, and casting down her eyes mournfully on the ground, "I fear that I am as indifferent to the beloved owner of this ringlet as lord Bodmyn is to me."

Mary flung an arm round the neck of Delia, and pressing her affectionately to her bosom, said—"Take, then, my advice, dearest Delia, and never become the wife of lord Bodmyn."

"Ah!" replied the embarrassed girl, "how can I resist the united wishes of all my family? His lordship is amiable, and much attached to me, and I have not the slightest hope that he whose image is ever present to my mind even regards me in the tender light of a relation: dear Mary, why should I hesitate to confess to

you, that it is your brother's hair which I have worn day and night since he quitted for ever my father's house."

Mary, affected by the tenderness of Delia, which she feared was not destined to meet with a return, kissed from her blushing cheek the tears of hopeless love. "That my brother loves you as a *sister*, I may venture to assure you, dearest Delia: more I dare not affirm. The unfortunate misunderstanding, occasioned by the unkind behaviour of lady Sarah to his orphan sister, still rankles in his heart, and checks its natural feelings: were you less wealthy, and the daughter of any other woman, my brother's conduct would be far different to what it now is."

A transient gleam of hope and pleasure enlivened the interesting countenance of Delia Fitzroy. "I live—I breathe—I feel a new creature!" said she, exultingly; "my beloved George has not included me in the dislike he feels for my family; he esteems me, and I am happy: dearest Mary, it is to you, to his sister, whom I have loved from

childhood, that I am now indebted for the first dawn of returning happiness."

The cousins affectionately embraced.

"Tell me," cried Delia, still holding Mary in her arms, "what is that cause, to which you alluded when I last saw you, as a reason for your going by a different name?"

"Alas! my dear Delia, I have not time to narrate the affliction which has befallen me, and which has for ever blighted all my brilliant prospects of felicity; yet, if you can place confidence in any female friend, I will write you an unreserved account of myself, and of those sorrows which have nearly overwhelmed me."

"Ah me! how you terrify and grieve me!" replied Delia, looking sweetly in the face of Mary; "I shall be unhappy until I hear from you: write, my beloved cousin, under cover to Mrs. Collins; she nursed us all, and is particularly attached to me and to your brother: lady Sarah, last year, gave her to attend on me, and I know

that I can confide in her affection with safety; let me therefore hear from you as soon as possible: to-morrow Elizabeth and I return to my mother's; direct, therefore, to her house."

Mary promised that she should hear from her in the course of a day or two.

"Though we cannot have the happiness of enjoying each other's society," said Delia, "we shall, by this means, be enabled to hold a constant correspondence, and to transmit whatever occurs of importance to our repose."

Mary now gave her cousin her address; then looking at her watch, they once more embraced, and returned to the drawing-room, where, to the great joy of Mary and her cousin Delia, they learnt that Elizabeth had been prevailed on to stay and partake of an early dinner.

Mary longed to introduce to the affectionate Delia her little darling; but how to accomplish it was a subject which required consideration. Elizabeth retired with lady Victoria to make some altera-

tion in her dress; and Delia, taking the arm of Mary, was proceeding to another chamber, when, under pretence of wanting some article which was at the cottage, they passed hastily through the garden, and running across the heath, soon gained the house of Mrs. Sutton.

Sophy, with Donald in her arms, opened the door. "You little angel!" cried Delia, kissing his blooming cheek. The boy extended his hands towards his mother, who, snatching him to her bosom, hurried up stairs, followed by her cousin.

Delia was not more delighted by the appearance of Mary's venerable old friend, than Mrs. Byron was herself at witnessing the amiable daughter of the proud lady Sarah.

"To whom does this lovely little fellow belong?" inquired Delia; "he is a perfect beauty; oh, let me have him! let me kiss his sweet mouth!"

Mary placed the smiling boy on the lap of her cousin—"He is mine, Delia," said

she, in a faltering voice; "will you not love him for my sake?"

Delia pressed the child with rapturous tenderness to her breast, and then turning towards his agitated mother, she exclaimed—"Yours, Mary! this little angel your son! and yet you pass by the name of Miss Seymour!"

"Yes, my dearest Delia, this sacred treasure owes his existence to your unhappy cousin; I will explain every thing to you by to-morrow's post: circumstances, which will render this infant, as well as myself, doubly dear to you, have obliged me to pass as his *aunt:* I *have* been the happiest of women; it is past! The consciousness alone of having done my duty prevents me from being the most miserable."

Delia kissed the upraised face of the beautiful boy, then embraced his unfortunate mother. "I do not need any explanation, my beloved Mary, to convince me that the sister of George must ever be dear to me; must ever deserve the af-

fection which I have cherished for her since I was capable of loving: rely, Mary, on my friendship, assure yourself of my tenderness, and believe that the independence which I possess in my own right shall be shared with you and your child."

"Noble Delia!" cried Mrs. Byron; "generous girl! when you learn the sad tale of your virtuous cousin, you will acknowledge that her fate is indeed a hard one; but that she has acted worthy of her name, worthy of herself, and of your affection."

The two cousins remained for a moment locked in each other's arms; till Mary, recovering herself, said, as she raised her head from the bosom of Delia—"I accept your friendship, my beloved cousin: as a proof of mine, and of the high trust I would repose in you, promise that, should any thing rob this adored boy of my protecting care, you will join with my brother in supplying to him the tender affection of his mother."

"Most solemnly I swear," cried Delia,

fervently, " to perform your wish: not even yourself, Mary, can watch over him with more vigilance and fondness than I will do, should you ever call upon me to supply the sacred office of a parent."

" I am satisfied, I am now happy," said Mary, dashing off her tears: " my brother George and my cousin Delia will be a father, a mother to my boy, should he ever stand in need of their protection."

The heart of Delia throbbed with new and delightful emotions at thus hearing her own name joined with that of George Fitzroy. With extreme reluctance she tore herself away from the beautiful child, and, with his equally beautiful mother, hastened back to the abode of Mrs. Chudleigh.

After the departure of the Miss Fitzroys, Mrs. Chudleigh, who had exerted herself much beyond her strength, was obliged to retire for an hour to her own room, whither Mary accompanied her; and as she perceived that the curiosity of her friend was naturally excited, she briefly informed her of the near relationship

which subsisted between herself and the Fitzroy family.

"My dear Mary," said the enfeebled Mrs. Chudleigh, "I needed not this proof of your confidence to convince me that you are descended from a good family: I have heard of lady Sarah from my guardians, and assure you that she is not much liked by her acquaintance: all her daughters, except the youngest, are said to partake, more or less, of their mother's disposition and hereditary pride: had she performed the duty of a relation to you, how different might have been your fate! yet indeed, my dear friend, I see no reason why you should disown your name, or refuse to accept from the father of Agnes the independence which is merely your right."

"Oh Heaven!" exclaimed Mary, shuddering; "I could not live to endure the pity of some and the censure of others; I could not bear to be pointed at as a poor, injured, and betrayed creature; neither could I exist to have it said by the malevolent and hard-judging part of mankind,

that my vanity was rightly served; that I had no business to marry the handsomest man of the age, without first inquiring most minutely into the state of his affairs."

Mrs. Chudleigh raised herself from the pillow of the couch, and taking the hand of Mary in her own, gave her a look so full of sorrow and surprise, that Mary, who immediately felt that her secret was discovered, sunk back, and burst into an agony of tears.

"Why this emotion, my beloved friend," said the invalid, "at the unintentional mention of a title which can only apply to *one* person? No consideration can ever prompt me to divulge either your name, or that of him whom you have so nobly, so heroically resigned: the strong resemblance which your son bears to the beautiful features of his father will, however, as he grows up, betray his birth."

Mary raised her eyes to those of the affectionate invalid—"Forgive me, dearest friend," said she, "that I have shewn any reluctance to confide to you the

adored name of Monteith; but I am a foolish, weak creature, and did I suppose that any one but yourself was acquainted with what I have just disclosed to you, it would rob me of the small portion of tranquillity which I now possess."

"I give you my word," replied Mrs. Chudleigh, "that not even a hint shall escape my lips of what has just passed between us: alas! my dear Mary, the idea of our approaching separation, and the probability that my exhausted frame may not even reach alive its destination, preys upon my spirits: never have I, since the death of my lamented Ernest, formed a wish to live until I saw you; your society, your tender attentions, have charmed to rest the keenness of my mental sufferings, and lulled even those of my body; I have only one wish; yet shame has withheld me from making it until now."

"Name it, my friend," cried Mary, with quickness; "I can refuse you nothing."

"It is that flattering idea which chains

my tongue, and makes me doubly feel the selfishness of my wants; but I will be candid, Mary; I will no longer deceive your tenderness with vain hopes; I feel that I am not long for this world, and that death would be deprived of all its terrors, could I but have the happiness of breathing my last sigh upon your bosom."

Mary was now completely overcome; she cast herself on her knees before the couch on which Mrs. Chudleigh lay exhausted. Insensible to every thing but the situation of the amiable invalid, and only conscious that she had expressed a wish, perhaps a dying wish, which she had the power to gratify, by the sacrifice of her own peace of mind, Mary no longer hesitated: she pressed the hand of Mrs. Chudleigh passionately to her lips—"Revive, dearest Maria!" she exclaimed, with all the generous enthusiasm of her nature; "thy wish is granted; we will not be separated; I will accompany you to Spain."

Mrs. Chudleigh could only press the affectionate girl to her languid heart; sur-

prise and pleasure operated too powerfully on her weak nerves, and she lay for some minutes motionless in the arms of Mary. At length recovering her voice, she said—"Beloved friend! and will you indeed give this second proof of noble self-denial? You, who cannot even for a night remain away from the idol of your soul, will you for me consent to make this generous sacrifice of your own peace? Mary, it is from HEAVEN your reward must come; from HIM whose protecting hand will shield thy little darling from every harm during the absence of his tender mother."

Sir William and his sister now inquired if they might be admitted. The tears which still were visible on the faces of Mary and the invalid alarmed them; but their anxiety was soon changed to gratitude and joy, when informed of the resolution of Mary not to leave her sick friend. Lady Victoria embraced her, and warmly applauded the goodness and kindness of her heart. "I shall quit you to-morrow," said she, "with less reluctance, my dear

Maria, as I am certain that, with such a companion as Miss Seymour, you can require no other attendance."

Sir William respectfully took her hand. "You have made *me* most happy," said he, fixing his eyes on her tearful countenance; "I no longer oppose the determination of Maria; all that love her, all that are related to her, must consider that by this disinterested action you have laid them under an obligation for life."

When Mary returned home, she found Mrs. Byron and little Donald in the parlour with Mrs. Sutton and her daughters: the unusual agitation she betrayed in caressing her laughing boy, and the embarrassment of her looks and replies, betrayed to the penetrating eye of her maternal friend that something of moment had occurred.

"Mary," said the venerable Mrs. Byron, "I am seldom mistaken in my conjectures; what I feared has happened; the enthusiasm of your character, the warmth of your attachment for Mrs. Chudleigh, has silenced your scruples, as well as claims of

a still stronger nature: your tears, your emotion, speak for you; I am to lose for a time my adopted daughter."

Mary placed her darling on the knees of Mrs. Sutton, and then flung herself on the bosom of her afflicted sister. "Forgive me, best of friends," she exclaimed, "for having ventured to dispose of myself without your consent; it was only this evening that I yielded to the wish of Mrs. Chudleigh: alas! how could I refuse to sooth by my presence the last moments of a friend so justly beloved? My absence will be a short one; I even fear that my dear Maria is too much exhausted to perform the voyage on which her heart is fixed."

"Poor, dear creature," said Mrs. Sutton, wiping her eyes, "I am sure, sister, that you cannot be angry with Miss Seymour for shewing such angel-like humanity to a poor, dying fellow-creature; God Almighty will reward her goodness, and protect her from all danger; and she need not be afraid to leave her nephew, for,

bless his dear heart! I could not love him better if he were my own child."

Mary turned hastily towards the happy smiling infant, and taking him in her arms, raised her beautiful eyes to Heaven, saying—"To thy divine mercy, oh Power Supreme! I confide this treasure of my soul: impelled by friendship and humanity to leave for a time the only tie which binds me to existence, I fearlessly rely on the protection of God and the affection of this amiable family to supply to him my place."

"That we will! that we will!" cried Mrs. Sutton and her daughters. "Bless his angel face! if we can help it, not a tear shall fall from his blue eyes while you are gone."

Mary felt that she was authorised to give ample credit to this assurance, since the only danger which was liable to happen would be from their spoiling her child by over-fondness, a fault which she could well excuse: that he would not have a wish ungratified she very well knew; yet

how she was to assume sufficient courage to take leave of him and her venerable friend, remained yet to be proved; it was a trial that would require *all* her fortitude, as well as all her eloquence, to hush the fears of Mrs. Byron, and to bring her to view her departure without those terrors and that repugnance which she now manifested.

CHAPTER IX.

NOTHING, however, could induce Mrs. Byron to become reconciled to the absence of her beloved Mary; the dangers of the voyage occurred to her mind with aggravated horrors; and she went the next day with Mary to pay a visit to Mrs. Chudleigh, fully determined to oppose her departure. The feeling heart of Mrs. Byron was assailed in its most vulnerable part, on beholding the pale, emaciated form of the

lovely sufferer, who, worn out with constant fever, and the exertion she had made in bidding adieu to lady Victoria Volatile, still found strength to describe, in animated language, her gratitude and love towards her generous young friend.

Mrs. Byron, softened by her situation, and perhaps by the probability of her being still persuaded to give up the voyage, at length consented to Mary's accompanying her. Being persuaded to stay and pass the day, the servant was dispatched for little Donald, who now received additional caresses from the invalid; while Mary seemed to watch every movement of the boy, lest the slightest should escape her notice; neither could she restrain the anxious tear from rushing into her eyes, as she remembered that every passing hour brought her nearer to *that* on which she should be obliged to leave her little idol.

In the midst of her distress and hurry, Mary did not, however, neglect to write to Delia; the communication she had to make was not of a nature to tranquillize

her feelings; but she had promised, and she would not disappoint her.

The next post brought with it the reply of her cousin; it was such as her character and disposition had led her to expect, and contained a repetition of the vow she had made, to be a mother to little Donald, should he ever stand in need of her assistance; and an earnest entreaty that Mary would take every opportunity to inform her of all that concerned her interest and welfare.

As the time approached which was to separate her from her child, the spirits of Mary seemed, in proportion, to abandon her; and at moments she even doubted if she should yet be able to keep sacred the promise she had made. Mrs. Chudleigh saw and felt for her distress; she proposed to her to give up her generous intention; but Mary rejected the idea, and from that moment concealed, as much as possible, from her friend, the internal agonies she endured.

Sir William, however, beheld with sus-

picious dread the struggles between love and friendship; he could well account for the child of a dead sister being sacredly dear to such a heart as Mary's; but as the boy was left with those who fondly studied how to gratify all his wishes, and as the absence of his aunt would not be for any serious length of time, the excessive sorrow she displayed seemed to him unnecessary and even foolish: the interest she had already excited in his breast made him, nevertheless, view her affliction with pity and friendly sympathy, and he exerted himself to the utmost to divert and amuse her mind from the subject on which it dwelt, regretting that it would not be in his power to leave London on the day fixed for their departure: he was, however, in hopes that, as they travelled slowly, he should be able to join them on the road.

At length the morning arrived which was to try anew the strength of Mary's fortitude. Mrs. Byron saw her almost fainting, and unable to bear up against the

moment of parting from her child: concealing her own feelings for the sake of her favourite, she assumed a borrowed courage, and talked as if Mary's visit was merely one of a few days; she continued to keep her in earnest conversation until the travelling carriage of Mrs. Chudleigh stopped at the door. Sir William was in it, as he was to be set down in town; and Mrs. Byron, who beheld the deathlike paleness of Mary as she clasped her son to her bosom, now entreated her to conquer as much as possible her sorrow, lest it should awaken in the mind of her early friend suspicions injurious to her character. Mary again and again embraced her little boy; again and again she conjured Mrs. Byron to write to her daily; then giving him to the care of Mrs. Sutton, who with her daughters affectionately begged leave to kiss her cheek, she gave her hand to her maternal friend, and hurried with all imaginable speed to the carriage, lest she should be unable to perform the task she had imposed on herself. Sir William

took her from Mrs. Byron, who found that her assumed spirits were now fast receding; she could only press her once more to her bosom, and implore for her the protection of Heaven; then kiss the extended hand of Mrs. Chudleigh, and hasten back to the house, wishing to conceal from the almost fainting Mary the excess of her own distress.

The carriage drove on, and in a few minutes the white cottage of Mrs. Sutton and the heath were no longer visible; it was then that the heart of Mary ceased to beat, and, unable to combat any longer against the feelings of a mother, she sunk insensible on the shoulder of sir William, who, forgetting his suspicions, and his secret determination of concealing how deeply she had interested him, betrayed to the terrified Mrs. Chudleigh the real state of his heart, in the tenderness he now evinced for the recovery of Mary.

Sir William and Mrs. Chudleigh at length succeeded in restoring their young friend to a sense of their kindness, and of

the necessity there was that she should struggle against the force of her own maternal affection. Thanking them with the most engaging sweetness for the trouble she had caused them, she attributed her indisposition principally to want of rest, as she and Mrs. Byron had sat up the best part of the night.

Sir William *appeared* to believe her, and in order to give her time to collect herself, he began to make some arrangements with Mrs. Chudleigh respecting her journey, and again expressed his hopes of being able to meet them before they reached the end of it. In town he was obliged to take his leave: the regret he felt was visible on his countenance as he bade them adieu; yet his absence was of service to Mary, since it now devolved upon her alone to pay those attentions to Mrs. Chudleigh which her delicate health required.

In thus being compelled to devote herself to the friend for whose comfort and happiness she had made so great a sacrifice, Mary insensibly became more resigned

to her removal, and temporary absence from her little darling; while Mrs. Chudleigh, who had witnessed the keenness of her anguish, felt and expressed the liveliest gratitude for this real proof of disinterested friendship: the extreme weakness of her bodily powers made the motion of the carriage painful to her, yet she bore it with angelic patience; not a complaint escaped her lips; her only wish seemed to be to hide from Mary the extent of her sufferings, and to force her own spirits, that she might enliven those of her affectionate companion.

In order to beguile the tediousness of the journey, Mrs. Chudleigh, during her short intervals of ease, proposed to give Mary some account of the character of lord D'Eresby, and of those who composed his family. "First," said she, "let me begin with that of my guardian; you will see him shortly, therefore I need not describe his person; it is such as, with the aid of highly-polished manners, will justify me in pronouncing him to be, though

near fifty, a man well calculated to captivate the unoccupied heart of a young woman. In his youth he formed an attachment to a beautiful Spanish lady, who, equally enamoured as himself, quitted her native land, and accompanied him on his travels, and finally returned with him to England. His father was then living, and strongly, I may say unjustly, opposed the match, on the grounds of donna Violante's being a catholic; at the same time urging him, on pain of his eternal displeasure, to marry the only child of a nobleman whom he had made choice of for a daughter; if he refused, he told him candidly that he should disinherit him without any sentiments of remorse.

"My guardian was not prepared to encounter so sad a reverse of fortune as that threatened him by his father; he made a confident of donna Violante, who, with the noble heroism of her country, immediately determined to sacrifice herself to the welfare of him she adored; she even advised him to comply, without less of

time, with the wishes of his father, and give his hand to the lady he had selected for him. Astonished by this singular counsel from a woman who he was but too well convinced continued to love him with undiminished fervour, my guardian hesitated how to decide; love, gratitude, and honour, made him resolve to disobey the claims of filial duty; but her constant entreaties at length prevailed, and upon her promising to remain in England, and to admit his visits as a *friend*, my guardian, in opposition to his own heart, became the husband of lady Susan——"

"Alas! poor donna Violante!" sighed Mary; "experience, sad experience, has enabled me to judge of what were her sufferings."

"Heaven appeared to frown upon this cruel separation of two faithful hearts," continued Mrs. Chudleigh; "in less than two years my guardian became a widower. Still the perverse obstinacy of his father, who was then fast declining in health, once more opposed his union with donna

Violante; he was however single; and the generous Spaniard once more became the bosom-friend and constant companion of my guardian, who meant most solemnly to marry her at the decease of his father, she steadily rejecting every proposal to become his wife before that event. The birth of the little Violante, however, deprived her noble mother of existence; and my guardian, who passionately loved her, could not bear to look upon the innocent cause which had robbed him of all he held dear.

On the decease of his father he became baron D'Eresby, and succeeded to a large estate. His first act was to have the body of his adored Violante taken up, and reburied in the family-vault, with the same honours as if she had been his wife; his next, to recall his little daughter, then five years old, and to invite to his house the lady to whose care she had been entrusted since the hour of her birth. Although the proposal was highly advantageous, Mrs.

Vernon hesitated to accept of it; she was to have the entire management of lord D'Eresby's domestic concerns, the superintendence of his daughter's education, and to be considered as the sole mistress of his family. Affection for her little charge induced her to consent; yet when she reflected that his lordship was not forty, and herself only thirty years of age, prudence suggested that her character might be lost by a residence under the same roof with so handsome a man, unless countenanced by the presence of another female.

"My guardian, in order to obviate this grand objection, proposed that Mrs. Vernon and his daughter should reside wholly at his estate near Plymouth, and that he would never visit it, unless accompanied by some female relation. Accordingly Mrs. Vernon took up her residence at D'Eresby House, where she continued till her death. This severe loss, I am told, is deeply felt by her young pupil, to whom she had faithfully discharged the tender duties of a mother; nay, William informs

me that Violante was quite a spoiled child, both by her father and Mrs. Vernon. Since the unfortunate death of the latter, an only sister of his lordship has resided with him and Miss D'Eresby; but from what has been described to me of lady Estifania Dorville, she must be a sad companion for a lovely girl of sixteen. In a short time, however, we shall be able to form our own judgment both of her ladyship and her niece, to whom, as I have never seen them, I am not sorry to have this opportunity of being introduced."

"Miss D'Eresby will, of course, possess all that her father has to bequeath to her," said Mary.

"She is already most handsomely provided for," replied Mrs. Chudleigh; "and as her father has resided constantly with her since the death of Mrs. Vernon, and entertains a great deal of company, Violante's beauty and wealth will soon provide for her a suitable match; I rather suspect that my guardian would have no

objection were sir William Beaufort to propose himself; but I know but of one woman in the world that I could bear to supply the place of my lost sister." The eyes of Mrs. Chudleigh met those of Mary, who could not misunderstand their meaning.

"Dearest friend!" said Mrs. Chudleigh, "I have always imagined until very lately, that, should William bestow his affections on another object, it would embitter my peace of mind; but since I have seen you, Mary, and discovered your value, my heart has cherished even a wish that sir William, who is one of the best of men, should attach himself to you for life: your sweetness, your ready obedience to the wishes of those you love, would make him amends for the disappointment he experienced in his first love; while his numerous virtues, his excellent disposition, and his feeling and affectionate heart, would call forth the grateful tenderness of yours, and restore you to that comfort and happi-

ness of which you have unfortunately been deprived."

Mary pressed the hand of the invalid. "What a compliment, my beloved Maria, have you just paid me! I shall remember it while I continue to exist; it will blunt the keenness of any insult I may in future receive; it will soothe my harassed feelings, and restore me to my own self-esteem; yet, dearest friend, forgive me if I request that you will never again mention your generous hope; if I thought that sir William regarded me in any other light than that of friendship, I should consider it as a serious misfortune; it would deprive me of the benefit of his advice, and make me feel uneasy in his presence; the heart that has once owned Monteith for its lord can never stoop to pay allegiance to another master."

As Mrs. Chudleigh had written to lord D'Eresby that she was on the road, his lordship met them at the last stage; and giving his horse to one of his attendants, got into the carriage of his ward, to whom

he behaved with such attentive tenderness during the remainder of the journey, that Mary, who was too apt to form hasty opinions, concluded that he was one among the few whom she should respect and esteem.

It was easy to discover by the conduct of lord D'Eresby that he had been prepared to meet, in the person of Mary, a friend highly valued by Mrs. Chudleigh: had she been less beautiful, less interesting, she would have met with every politeness from his lordship; but when he discovered that the beloved companion of his ward was a young and lovely woman, evidently under twenty, the attentions which he paid her proceeded from something more than respect to the wishes of the fair invalid; and so extremely pleasant, so entertaining, and so polished was his conversation, that Mary, though fatigued, felt sorry when they were interrupted by the stopping of the carriage at his lordship's seat.

In the hall, the roof of which was supported by pillars of white marble, round

which entwined a variety of natural flowers still in blossom, they were met by lady Estifania Dorville and Miss D'Eresby; while on each side were ranged the numerous servants of his lordship, arrayed in rich liveries of green and gold, which were rendered more enlivening by the bright crimson of their other garments. Lady Estifania was turned of fifty, tall, and stately in all her movements; she had been handsome in her youth, but time had destroyed her charms, and only left the ruin of what she once was; her manners were courtly and dignified, but so cold and distant, that for a moment the heart of Mary felt a chill. The genial warmth, however, quickly returned as she felt the lively pressure of Violante's hand, and heard the cheerful welcome which she gave, wild and unstudied as her native beauties.

Lord D'Eresby, assisted by Mary, supported Mrs. Chudleigh to the drawing-room, one glance over which immediately betrayed the magnificent taste of the

owner; and for a few minutes Mary stood lost in admiration. The simplicity to which she had been accustomed, and the retired life she had led, made her in a great measure ignorant of the costly style in which the mansions of the nobility were now fitted up; but her astonishment was soon interrupted by Mrs. Chudleigh, whose excessive lassitude obliged her to retire to her chamber for the evening. Lady Estifania hoped that she would find every thing arranged agreeable to her wishes; lord D'Eresby embracing her tenderly, entreated her to consider herself at home, and begged that she would not suffer her politeness to interfere with her ease, saying, that however happy he should feel in seeing her make one at his table, yet if she found rest and retirement necessary to her comfort, she had only to order whatever she thought proper to be served in her own apartments.

"Violante," said his lordship, "this young lady must be *your* peculiar care; never before have you had the opportunity

of cultivating so sweet a friendship; I trust that you will be sedulously attentive to anticipate the wishes of Miss Seymour. To-night," he continued, turning towards Mary, and respectfully pressing her little soft white hand to his lips, "to-night I consign you to my daughter; to-morrow I will endeavour to prove how highly I revere the *friend* of my beloved ward."

Miss D'Eresby now assisted Mary to conduct the enfeebled invalid to the chambers prepared for her reception; they passed up a noble marble staircase, enriched with valuable paintings, and ornamented like the hall with odoriferous shrubs, whose varied perfume delighted the exhausted sufferer, who stopped to inhale their odour.

"Oh, if you are fond of flowers," cried Violante, good-naturedly plucking some of the finest, and presenting them to Mrs. Chudleigh and to Mary, "I will order plenty to be placed in your sitting-room before you are up to-morrow."

She then led them into a long carpeted gallery, from the ceiling of which were suspended eight antique lamps of coloured glass, to light to the apartments which were on one side of the gallery; opposite to which were windows down to the ground; they opened into a covered balcony that ran along the whole western side of the mansion, and commanded a grand and truly sublime view of the adjacent ocean, and of the finely-disposed grounds of D'Eresby House; the whole of the gallery was hung with pictures from the best masters; the curtains were of purple velvet richly fringed with gold; and in the different recesses were placed Grecian couches covered with the same; by the side of each stood a little velvet footstool, for the accommodation of the indolent or weary.

At the bottom of this gallery was a suite of rooms, which, from the beauty of their situation and the fineness of their views, had been appropriated to the ward of lord D'Eresby; they consisted of a sit-

ting-room, bed-chamber, and large dressing-closet, in which had been placed a bed for the attendant of the invalid. The windows of each apartment communicated with the western balcony, and were hung with French curtains of rose-coloured satin; the chairs and sofas were covered with the same. Between each window of the sitting-room was a large mirror that reflected the surrounding objects, among which were some pleasing portraits of the ancestors of lord D'Eresby. In the middle of the room stood a table formed of porcelain, and painted by Violante from Spanish scenery; it was supported by four silver Cupids, each holding a small scroll, on which was engraven some lines from the best Italian poets, and applicable to the grace and beauty of Miss D'Eresby's mother; a variety of different ornaments decorated the chimney-piece and the recesses of the room, round which were placed stands for books, flowers, and china of Violante's painting.

"Do not be alarmed lest the rooms

should be damp," said Miss D'Eresby; "for they are mine, and I only vacated them this morning."

Mrs. Chudleigh apologized for having been the cause of her removal.

"Oh, don't mention it," said she, with a vivacity that rendered her highly captivating; "I thought, from their quiet situation, that they would be more convenient than any others, and therefore proposed to my father to resign them for your accommodation; but I shall not be far from you; should you want any thing, or feel indisposed in the night, you have only to send your attendant to the suite of apartments next to these, and by thus making me useful to you, confer an obligation on myself."

Mary could have hugged the amiable girl for this readiness to oblige the friend she loved. Tea was ordered to be brought; and Violante, who had already become the favourite of both Mary and the invalid, was requested to stay and do the honours of the table, to which she joyfully con-

sented. To Mrs. Chudleigh, as the ward of her father, Violante shewed a respectful tenderness; to Mary, who was rather better than two years older than herself, she behaved with an affectionate confidence, an openness of manner, as if they had been acquainted from their childhood, and which so well accorded with the disposition of the latter, that the attachment soon became mutual, and Violante entreated Mary to share with her the apartments which were airing for herself. This, however, Mary politely declined, as it was her intention not to separate from the invalid. Miss D'Eresby forbore to press the subject; but imagining that Mary meant to occupy the dressing-closet, she was going to make some alterations, when Mary replied, that with the permission of Mrs. Chudleigh, she should rob her of part of her bed. "If I were not to do this," said she, "I know that the affection of my dear friend would prevent her from receiving any relief or consolation by my presence."

Mrs. Chudleigh smiled affectionately on

Mary, but she was too much fatigued to converse; and Violante, who feared lest her stay might at this moment be troublesome, took leave of them for the night, strictly enjoining Mary to send to her, should she be in want of any thing.

The travellers soon retired to the interior chamber, the decorations of which corresponded with those of the sitting-room; this also was hung round with pictures, but they were chiefly landscape-scenery from the Italian school, and though exquisitely beautiful, Mary deferred examining them for the present.

Mrs. Chudleigh, worn out with the motion of the carriage, retired to bed; and Mary, who could not close her eyes without first addressing a few lines to Mrs. Byron, seated herself in an easy chair by the side of the fire for that purpose. Her eyes, however, naturally wandered over the apartment, which was now only faintly illumined by the flame of a silver lamp, which, as it burnt, emitted an aromatic odour. The toilet of Miss D'Eresby re-

mained, to prevent the unnecessary trouble of unpacking more than was requisite for the immediate use of the invalid; all the boxes and ornaments of the dressing-table were gold; even the frame of the looking-glass was silver-gilt, and the bottles for the various perfumes of Violante were richly cut, with gold tops, on which the name of Viola was engraven. The covering of the table was white sarsenet, with a deep border of purple violets; on each side of the glass was placed a Grecian figure of the same metal as the frame, the hands of which supported wax tapers, which enabled the lovely mistress of these treasures to adorn a person which required no ornament to heighten its captivation. An elegant case full of books splendidly bound next attracted the notice of Mary, who judging, from what she had heard, that they were the choice of Violante, rose softly and went towards it, thinking that by the selection she might discover the mind and taste of Miss D'Eresby; they consisted chiefly of poetry from the French

and Italian, with some of their best novels and romances; to these were added the most entertaining in her own language. Curiosity prompted Mary to open one of the amatory poems; several of the passages were marked in pencil, and plainly betrayed that the heart of Violante was no stranger to the tenderness of love. Mary closed the case, and returned to perform the pleasing task of writing to her maternal friend.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT morning, as soon as Mrs. Chudleigh's bell had rung, Violante begged to be admitted. Her light and graceful form scarce pressed the carpet as she flew to kiss the extended hand of the invalid, and to inquire, in a voice which vied with the musical sweetness of Mary's, how she had passed the night? A hectic fever

preyed upon the languid frame of Mrs. Chudleigh, and the violence of her cough was increased by a cold which she had caught during the journey. She therefore gladly availed herself of her guardian's permission, and had breakfast in her own apartment.

As soon as it was known that she was up, lord D'Eresby and his sister paid Mrs. Chudleigh a visit; and Mary, at the desire of Violante, proceeded to inspect the beauties of the mansion.

In was in vain that the amiable invalid endeavoured to hide from the watchful eyes of her guardian the extreme exhaustion of her bodily powers; the cough, the hectic flush, and the state of her pulse, greatly alarmed him, and he entreated her to consult with his family-physician before she attempted to embark for the Peninsula.

"Let me beseech you," said lady Estifania Dorville, with great stateliness, yet with evident humanity, "to be guided by his lordship's advice; it is of the highest

importance to your relations and friends that you should not rashly endanger a life which is precious to them; I really feel deeply concerned, Mrs. Chudleigh, to see you so much weakened by your journey; but I also derive consolation in witnessing the sisterly attentions of that lovely young woman who has just left us; I am not apt to give way to first impressions, but after endeavouring to resist the effects of them, I find this morning that they are as strong as ever, and that Miss Seymour's modest and unassuming manners, joined to her tender solicitude for your comforts, have gained my good opinion and esteem, even against my own will; for it is a rule which I have laid down, and which I have adhered to for many years, never to bestow on any one my friendship until I have proved them to be deserving of it."

"In this instance," replied Mrs. Chudleigh, "your ladyship may with safety make Miss Seymour an exception to the rule; when I was first introduced to her by my cousin Richardson, I could barely

say that I existed; I had uniformly led a life of constant seclusion, which increased my disorder, and took from me all bodily powers of exertion; the sweet attentions of Miss Seymour, her conversation, and her various accomplishments and talents, which are of a superior order, first roused me from the lethargic state into which I had fallen, and made me feel that the world yet possessed a balm for my wounds, a charm that could soften down the poignancy of my grief, and make the heavy hours appear as minutes."

"Indeed!" exclaimed lady Estifania, in a tone of surprise; "and was this powerful charm to be found alone in the society of Miss Seymour?"

"Even so," replied the invalid, with grateful affection. "The effect which her presence had upon my spirits and my health made my generous friend determine to devote her time solely to me; the same attachment and disinterested friendship have led her to sacrifice all personal considerations, and to accompany me to

Spain; I should be unworthy of such a heart as hers, did I not feel happy in having an opportunity of acknowledging *her* value, my own obligations, and of endeavouring to secure to her the esteem and good offices of your ladyship and my worthy guardian."

"You have enchanted me, Maria," cried lord D'Eresby, "with the character you have drawn of Miss Seymour; I will hope that in some way or other it may be in my power to repay a part of the debt you owe her."

"She must be an excellent young woman," said lady Estifania Dorville, "and deserves to be patronized even by me; pray, Mrs. Chudleigh, what are her connexions? she has the appearance of a gentlewoman."

"She is an orphan of good family," replied Mrs. Chudleigh, "and has received an education which is by no means superficial; her finances are limited, and in consequence of the recent death of a beloved relative, she is now under the pro-

tection of a venerable female friend, who has also to extend her kindness to a little boy, the nephew of Miss Seymour, whose mother bequeathed him, as a dying gift, to the care of my friend, until his father, who is abroad, should return to England. Such a gift could not fail to render the infant doubly dear to Mary, who has cherished him with all a mother's tenderness since the loss of his own, and nothing on earth, I am persuaded, could have induced her to quit her little nephew but her affection for me, and her entire conviction that her loss would be to me irreparable."

"Alas!" exclaimed lady Estifania, forgetting for a moment her natural stateliness, "an orphan, portionless and nearly friendless! Alas! alas! and so young and lovely!" Then resuming her usual manner—"I am glad, Mrs. Chudleigh, that you know this young woman, as well for your own comfort, as for her good; through her kindness to you, she may meet with friends that may be of use to her."

Lord D'Eresby was silent, but he felt not less interested; the few hours which he had passed in the company of Mary had impressed him with a high opinion of her mind; the symmetry of her form pleased his critic eye, and the beauty of her features, the delicacy of her skin, only wanted the addition of a colour to aid the natural brilliancy of her fine blue eyes, and heighten the fascination of her pensive countenance. His penetration immediately discovered that a hidden grief, even more serious than that of friendly concern for his ward, had faded the rose which yet occasionally blushed upon her fair cheek as she met his admiring glance, and he now felt a stronger motive than curiosity to know if hopeless love had aimed his envenomed dart against the bosom of the lovely stranger.

Mary meanwhile followed the light footsteps of Violante over the splendid mansion of her father; herself the child of love, and reared by the hand of blind affection, Violante's mind had been suf-

fered to pursue its own inclinations, and to follow the unchecked impulses of a heart which made love the sovereign lord of all its movements; in her opinion, that passion which governed the noble soul of her deceased mother, and which had taught *her* to sacrifice herself, her fame, and all that was most sacred, to the welfare of her lover, was the sole object worthy to occupy the heart of a woman; and Violante had scarcely attained her thirteenth year, when her own beat with resistless energy to become the sole mistress of the affections of a young man who for a short time resided under the same roof with herself.

Warm and ardent in her attachments, she nevertheless wanted the constancy of her mother, and though at first half distracted by the departure of Edgar Mordaunt, a second passion, fiercer than the first, soon took possession of the light and wavering soul of Violante. No obstacle, no fear, had power to damp its fervour; in the short space of a fortnight, she contrived to have frequent interviews with the ob-

ject of her regard; they exchanged vows of mutual tenderness, and parted. Two years had elapsed, and still Violante remained unchanged; the letters of her lover, which breathed a passion warm and fervent as her own, served to rekindle the flame which burnt in the bosom of Violante, and the cherished hope of soon receiving his tender caresses, reanimated her beyond her usual spirits, and gave to her large and languishing black eyes a fire which dazzled the beholder.

In the person of Mary, Miss D'Eresby beheld a companion suited to her years, while the pensive tenderness of her features assured her that she might, without fear, confide to her the secret of her soul. Mary, equally charmed by the appearance of Violante, listened with pleasure to her conversation and remarks, which, though tinctured by romance and love, yet nevertheless displayed a versatility of native wit and talent that made her society fascinating.

If the senses of Mary had been dazzled

y the richness of lord D'Eresby's family rawing-room, they were still more so when is daughter, with one arm passed famiarly round her neck, led her through seeral suites of apartments fitted up acording to the costume of different naions, all exhibiting a display of wealth, aste, and magnificence, perfectly new to he conception of Mary. The splendour f the gold and silver ornaments, the size nd beauty of the mirrors, the richness of he various lamps which were suspended rom the painted ceilings, all separately atracted the admiration of Mary; yet she eturned with pleasure to the first apartnent, which, though less costly than the thers, had an air of comfort and happiess that made Mary prefer it to the rest; ts draperies, which hung round the room, vere of white velvet beautifully painted; he chairs, sofas, and ottomans, were made o correspond, while the curtains, which artly concealed the light of four large vindows opening on the wildly-diversified

grounds of the house, were blue satin with a deep fringe of silver; they were fastened back by a little chain, which hung round the neck of a silver dove, fit emblem of the peaceful harmony which reigned among the inhabitants of D'Eresby House.

In one corner of the apartment stood the harp of Violante, and in a recess was placed a grand piano, over which she ran her slender fingers with a carelessness that betrayed either a want of skill or want of taste; Mary thought that it could not be the latter, and therefore requested her new friend to play an Italian air which was before her. Violante entered into the enamoured feelings of the poet, but she did not do justice to the composer; and Mary immediately discovered that she had been but an inattentive pupil, as her knowledge in music was very little above mediocrity.

They were now joined by lord D'Eresby and lady Estifania Dorville, the latter of whom coming up to Mary, said—"I have been listening, Miss Seymour, to the pleas-

ing character of an amiable and excellent young woman, whose kindness towards the suffering ward of lord D'Eresby has gained both his esteem and mine: Miss Seymour, I respect the qualities of your head and heart, and shall be happy to render you any service."

Mary courtesied to her ladyship with modest grace, and thanking her for the honour she had just conferred, assured her ladyship that she would endeavour to merit the esteem thus generously bestowed on a stranger.

Lord D'Eresby took her hand, and joining it with that of his daughter, said—"All that I ask *at present* of Miss Seymour is, that she will look upon Violante as a sister."

"And consider you as her brother, my dear father?"

The fine glow on his lordship's countenance grew deeper; he kissed the high and polished forehead of his daughter, saying, "I must first, my Violante, secure the

good opinion, the confidence of your charming friend, before I ask to be considered in the tender light of a relation."

Lady Estifania now quitted the chamber, having invited Mary and her niece to accompany her in a walk. Lord D'Eresby also joined his entreaties. "Has my daughter shewn you the different apartments which were likely to afford you any amusement?" said he.

Mary replied that she had been indebted to Miss D'Eresby for the display of what had convinced her of the superior and refined taste of his lordship; never before had she witnessed such an assemblage of elegance blended with magnificence.

Lord D'Eresby appeared highly pleased. "But you have not," said he, "had time to examine my collection of pictures; if you will allow me, I shall feel honoured by your permission to explain them to you myself."

Mary of course consented; but anxious to return to Mrs. Chudleigh, she would not promise to walk with them until she

had first seen her friend. She therefore hastened to the chamber of the invalid, who persuaded her, against her will, to gratify the wishes of her guardian and his sister. She accordingly again descended, to the joy of Violante, who still loitered in the hope of hearing her footstep.

Lady Estifania took the arm of Mary, who no longer felt chilled by her presence. In conversing with her and lord D'Eresby, Mary unconsciously increased the admiration of both; the diffidence, yet graceful sweetness of her manners, charmed his lordship; while the pleasing attentions which she paid to the age and opinions of her ladyship secured her regard, and actually induced her to drop insensibly the *hauteur* and stateliness of her deportment, in proportion as she listened to the just and elegant observations of her youthful companion, which the beauty of their walk through the grounds of his lordship, and the grandeur of the views, occasionally called forth.

Nothing could exceed the sublime ef-

fect of the ocean, which here and there broke upon their sight through the opening of the trees, as they ascended some woody eminences for the purpose of catching a glimpse of the sea; and Mary, to whom the scene was perfectly new, could not restrain the delight she now felt, or check her admiration of all that surrounded her. Although it was the middle of winter, yet every thing bore the air of early autumn; the flowers blossomed, and the birds sang as sweetly as in that season of the year when Nature puts on her richest livery, and clothes the landscape with unnumbered beauties.

On their return to the house, a servant announced the arrival of sir William Beaufort; and Mary, who had a secret hope that he might be the bearer of a letter for herself, hastened to the apartment of Mrs. Chudleigh with an eagerness which did not escape the notice of lord D'Eresby, who, with his sister and the light-footed Violante, followed to bid him welcome.

Sir William rose at the entrance of

Mary; and hurrying to meet her, inquired, in the tenderest voice, after her health? Exercise had called the rose to her cheek, which deepened as the friendly wish of the invalid crossed her mind; though confused, she yet expressed her pleasure at his presence.

"Let me increase it, my lovely friend," said sir William, "and insure to myself a still sweeter welcome." He then presented to her a letter from Mrs. Byron, and another from Delia. "What do I not deserve," said he, "for being the bearer of such important intelligence as the perfect health of your little nephew? My business detained me longer than I expected, and I therefore drove post to Hampstead, that I might afford Mrs. Byron an opportunity of writing a few lines to assure you of the welfare of those most dear to you."

Mary's eloquent eyes spoke her gratitude; but the entrance of the family checked the warm thanks she would have uttered. Sir William dropped her hand,

and she retired into the inner apartment to read her treasured letters.

That of Mrs. Byron was short, but it contained the rapturous assurance of her dear boy's welfare, and the important news that she had given her address to Mrs. Monteith, who with her husband were now in London. The former had taken the opportunity of calling at Hampstead during the absence of Monteith, full of the hope of embracing her. She had passed the day with Mrs. Byron, talking of Mary, and caressing her lovely boy, and had expressed the utmost sorrow at the cause of his mother's absence. Mr. Graham was in Scotland; but as Agnes had promised to write to Mary immediately, Mrs. Byron had left it to her to communicate the conversation that had passed between them. It concluded with a warm eulogium on sir William, and an earnest entreaty that Mary would be doubly attentive to her own health.

The letter of Delia, and the affectionate

confidence it displayed, revived the hurried spirits of Mary. The rapture to which the certainty of her child's safety gave birth was checked by the mention of his father's name, and the rose had ceased to blush on her cheek when she returned to the sitting-room of the invalid.

The physician of lord D'Eresby was now announced, and the gentlemen of course retired. Mary anxiously watched his features, as if to gather from them his real sentiments; he was a man of few words, and though possessed of great skill and practical knowledge, his manners were by no means either gentle or conciliatory; he plainly told Mrs. Chudleigh that she must give over all thoughts of a sea-voyage, as it would be immediately fatal to her, and he ordered her to remain where she was, and to keep as tranquil as possible; the mildness of the climate and good nursing, with a steady adherence to his prescriptions, might yet save her life. Mrs. Chudleigh *felt that* to be impossible; yet,

upon the return of her guardian and sir William, still expressed a desire to attempt the attainment of her wishes.

All, however, except Mary, warmly opposed the design; she alone was silent, from motives of delicacy, lest *her* advice should seem selfish.

"What says my Mary? Does she oppose my darling wish?" inquired the invalid.

Mary pressed the burning hand of Mrs. Chudleigh to her lips; she bent over the couch on which she lay, and softly whispered in her ear—"You know my readiness to accompany you, dearest Maria; I I have no will but yours."

The invalid raised her languid eyes to the pensive face of Mary; they expressed, in silent eloquence, her heart's convulsive throbbings.

Again lord D'Eresby and sir William, who had privately spoken to the physician, entreated her in the tenderest manner to relinquish, at least for the present, her dangerous voyage. Mrs. Chudleigh

had not power to combat against their united persuasions; at length she yielded; but the starting tears which chased each other down her crimson cheek betrayed how much it cost her to relinquish the fond wish of her soul.

"To-morrow," said sir William, "I must embark; my stay may not exceed a month; it may even be shorter; I will yet cherish the hope of entertaining you on board my ship, and of assisting you, Maria, to perform the tribute of conjugal affection."

"That must be done in heaven," faintly replied the exhausted sufferer; "for not in this world does the Almighty permit me to fulfil my vow; my soul, emancipated from its earthly fetters, will fly through the regions of space, and hovering over the spot which contains the remains of my sainted Ernest, protect from injury the ground made sacred by his ashes!"

"Banish these melancholy ideas, my beloved ward," said lord D'Eresby; "they affect us deeply; your lovely friend has

been obliged to quit the chamber, that her distress might not be witnessed by those to whom it only renders her more estimable."

Lady Estifania rose with dignity, and followed Mary, who, with the good-natured Violante, had retired to weep unseen in the bed-room of the invalid. The arms of Miss D'Eresby were thrown round the neck of Mary, who rose on the entrance of her ladyship, and came forward to take her extended hand.

"Do not give way, Miss Seymour, to this amiable affliction, for so I may surely term the sorrow which you testify for the ward of lord D'Eresby; yet grieve not, my sweet girl; if it should please Heaven to deprive you of one friend, you have gained another. Dry your tears, my children, and return with me; Mrs. Chudleigh needs rest; we will leave her to your care."

After a slumber of an hour the invalid awoke somewhat refreshed; and Mary read to her the letters of Mrs. Byron and her cousin, with a view of diverting her

thoughts from her recent disappointment. "I feel so much better," said Mrs. Chudleigh, "since I have slept, that I mean to take my tea this evening with you in the drawing-room, unless there are any visitors; and do you, my love, to oblige me, make one at the dinner-table."

To this, however, Mary positively objected; and Violante, who had just entered and heard the intention of her father's ward, gave orders that no company should be admitted, and that the hour of dining should be earlier than usual.

The charm of Mary's presence, the hope of hearing her syren voice, made the gentlemen rise from table as soon as lady Estifania motioned to retire. They then hastened to the chamber of the invalid, who, though weak and scarcely able to move, still felt a desire to pass the last evening of sir William's stay with him and the family, as well as from a wish to hear Violante and Mary perform on the harp. Supported by sir William and lord D'Eresby, Mrs. Chudleigh passed through

the gallery and gained the stairs; here she was obliged to pause to recover breath, when sir William, taking her gently in his arms, carried her in safety to the bottom, and thence into the drawing-room. The exertion, as was to be feared, overcame her; but she soon recovered, and then made known the motives of her visit. Another harp was instantly procured from the music-room, which lord D'Eresby presented to Mary; he then selected some of his favourite music from the beautiful compositions of Thomas Moore; but Mary's touch was so far superior to that of Violante, that, after they had played some duets, his lordship requested that they would make a trial of their skill on the piano; here again the superiority of Mary was felt by lord D'Eresby, and acknowledged by his daughter with great good-nature. Lady Estifania also complimented her on the excellence of her performance and the sweetness of her voice, and begged that she would oblige her by giving her niece some instructions; while

lord D'Eresby declared that he had been so completely enchanted by the taste and feeling she evinced, as well as by the rich mellowness of her voice, that he would sooner listen to a song sung by Miss Seymour than to any of our first-rate singers.—"My fondness for music," said his lordship, "made me desirous that Violante should excell in that delightful art; but she is a little wild creature, spoiled by too much indulgence, and has neglected to study it as much as she ought to have done. Your goodness has led you, my dear Miss Seymour, to promise her a part of your time; I will not *say* how *much* I shall value any little attention shewn to my daughter, but I will tell you, that, should she be able to catch a portion of your inspired genius, and play with the same magic sweetness as yourself, my obligation will not be a light one."

"Dearest father," cried Violante, throwing her graceful arms around his neck, and fondly kissing his cheek, "with such an instructress as my dear Miss Seymour, I

will exert all the talents I possess to please you, and to evince my gratitude to her." She then sprang back to Mary, with the agility of a fawn, and embracing her new friend, expressed her thanks for her intended kindness, in her usual warm and animated language, and with a grace which seemed to dwell in every look or movement of the dark-eyed beauty.

"Has not that young creature, sir William, already learnt to fascinate?" inquired the doting father.

Sir William replied in the affirmative; could he do otherwise, as his eyes wandered over the perfect symmetry of her ever-changing form, clad in a robe of the finest muslin, through which was seen the firm round bosom that throbbed with all the wild romantic passion of a glowing imagination? the diamonds which sparkled on her long and polished neck were scarce more brilliant than the dazzling fire of her dark eyes, aided by the crimson of her clear brown cheek; her round and dimpled arms, encircled with Eastern chains of

gold, and clasped with jewels, were bare to the shoulder. The voluptuous display of nature's liberal beauties might excite in the heart of sir William a thrill of momentary passion, but the language of love which melted in the eye of Violante, the half-naked breast, exposed to the gaze of vulgar observation, forbad for ever the excitement of a pure and honourable attachment; the soul of sir William disdained the possession of charms which were to be seen by every one; and Violante, though young, beautiful, and formed to be adored, even to madness, was, therefore, not the object which attracted his senses or fascinated his heart.

It was one in whose sweetly-pensive face the blush of modesty kindled at the gaze of admiration or the voice of praise, whose form, beautifully proportioned by the hand of grace, yet left all to the luxuriant *imagination* of man; the snowy bosom, the white and polished arm, no more exposed than decency might sanction, were nevertheless sufficiently seen to be admired; no

Eastern chains or sparkling diamonds vied with the occasional lustre of Mary's sapphire eyes; sorrow had robbed them of their quick and dazzling glances, and only left the faded rose to blossom on her cheek. The modest elegance of her figure received no aid from dress; clothed in a simple robe of black lace, with no ornament but the emerald brooch of Delia on her bosom, and a narrow black ribbon round her neck, to which was suspended the covered miniature of Monteith, Mary formed a striking contrast to the splendour of every thing that surrounded her; and though the beauty of her features was not of that languishing order as those of Violante, yet sir William's heart told him that Mary was capable of inspiring a more lasting attachment, since once loved, she must be loved for ever. "Such," thought sir William, as he gazed on Mary with friendly solicitude, "is the woman that I could wish to select for a companion for life; but circumstances seem to omen a second disappointment."

Mrs. Chudleigh appeared to derive so much pleasure from the soothing effects of music, that Mary began to hope she was not yet beyond the power of medicine to save. This delightful illusion was too soon dispelled; a night of fever, heightened by incessant coughing, convinced Mary of the slenderness of her hopes.

Sir William breakfasted with the invalid; the melancholy expression of his features, which conveyed to the mind of Mary his fears, affected her spirits; but she strove to appear cheerful, though at moments her heart seemed bursting with the weight of its sorrow. Mrs. Chudleigh appeared perfectly aware that this was her last interview with sir William, yet her mind was collected, and her fortitude not assumed. In order to give her an opportunity of expressing all her wishes, Mary for a short time quitted the chamber, but was soon recalled by sir William, who, with eyes dim with tears, silently conducted her to the couch of the sufferer.

"Dearest Mary," said Mrs. Chudleigh, in a low voice, "perhaps it is the will of Providence that I should be summoned hence before the return of sir William. Let me not, therefore, lose the only opportunity I may ever again have of recommending him to you, my dearest Mary, as a friend in whom you may safely confide your most secret thoughts. Promise me, dear girl, that should you ever stand in need of advice or assistance, you will, out of affection for me, apply to my invaluable counsellor, my dear adopted brother, to whose care and affection I now bequeath you." She placed the hand of Mary in that of sir William.

"Thus," said she, emphatically, "let me unite, in the sacred bands of friendship, the two beings whom on earth I most value. Dear William, when I am no more, let the faithful affection which you have ever manifested for me be transferred to the friend who has so nobly devoted herself to my comfort; and you, my tender,

my beloved Mary, receive from me a brother, who will most honourably fulfil the duties of one, and who will willingly become the guardian and protector of all you love best." She paused from excessive weakness.

Sir William still held the trembling hand of Mary; he kissed away the tears which fell on it. "Precious drops!" he exclaimed; "emblems of a friendship worthy to be recorded for its noble generosity; oh, may the fears of our Maria prove false! May Heaven restore her to our prayers! Yet may the friend she loves still accept the voluntary services of a heart devoted to her interest!" He looked earnestly in the tearful eyes of Mary. "I only asked to be allowed the privilege of a brother," said sir William; "I promise to address you as a sister; will you accept of me as such?"

Mary, though deeply affected by the situation of Mrs. Chudleigh, could not withhold from her early friend the wished-for reply.

"I am satisfied," murmured the languid invalid.

"I am blest beyond my hopes!" exclaimed sir William, imprinting on her soft hand a tender kiss; then turning towards his dear Maria, he for some minutes held her in his trembling arms, ashamed, yet unable to conceal the various feelings by which he was agitated. At length he was compelled to tear himself away; Mary had retired to the end of the room to hide her emotions. Sir William stopped as he was quitting it. "One moment, Miss Seymour, only one moment," said he, taking her hand, and leading her into the gallery; "tell me, sweet sister, may I dare hope that you will write to me during my absence, and that you will receive the letters of your brother?"

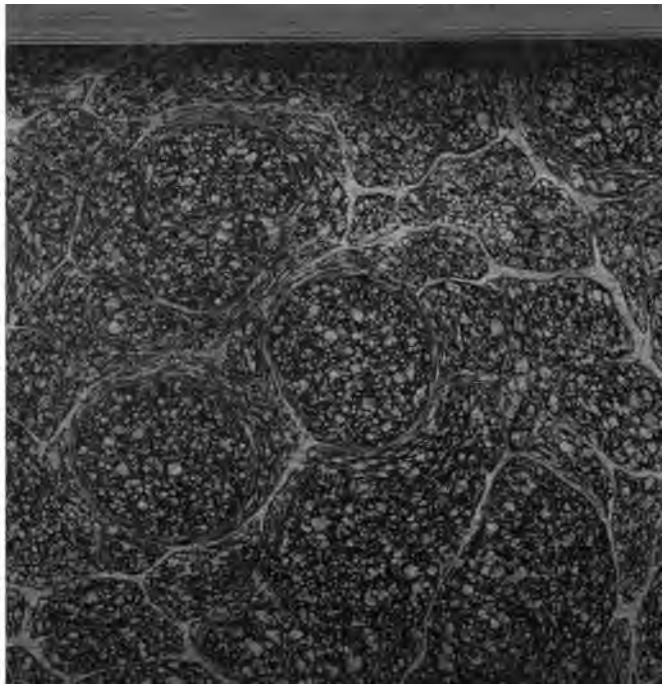
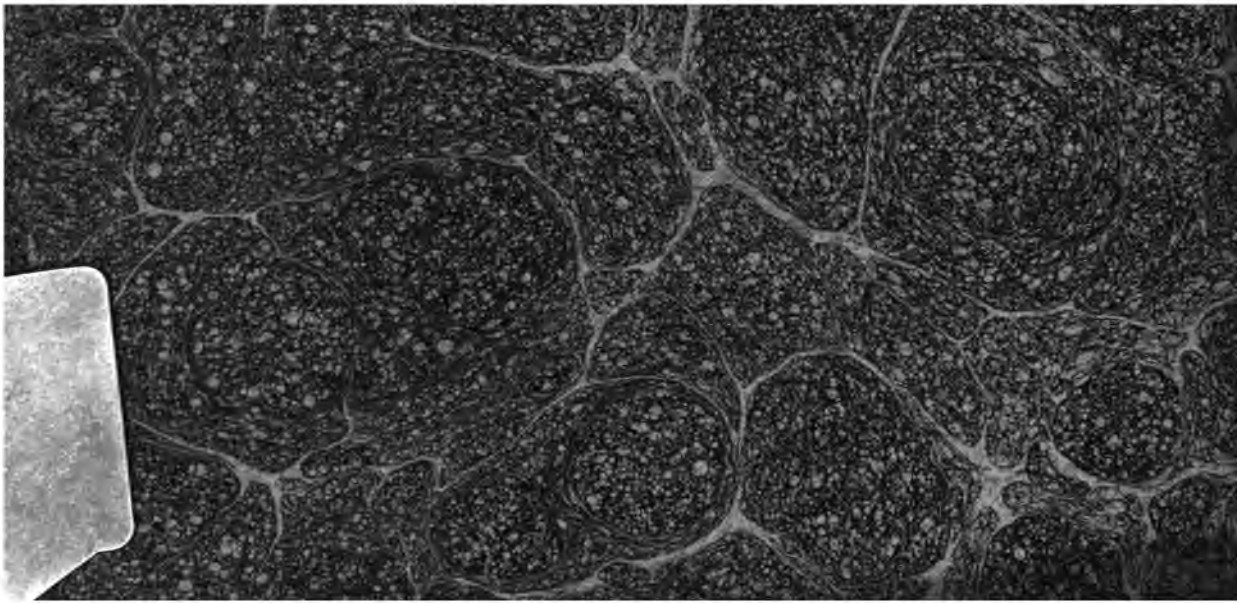
"As the amanuensis of our beloved Maria, you will hear from me frequently, sir William," replied Mary, still weeping.

"I fear," said sir William, much agi-

tated, and lowering his voice, "that you will too soon cease to fulfil the wishes of Maria."

"Do you really think there is no hope?" inquired Mary, as she turned on him her anxious face bedewed with tears.

"None! I dare not deceive you; all hope is lost!"

Mary sunk on the couch by which she had been standing, and covering her face, no longer attempted to repress the agony she felt; while sir William, equally affected, bent over her in silent grief. Mary at length remembered that her suffering friend might even now be in want of her assistance; she rose, and attempted to bid adieu to sir William, but her voice faltered; the sight of his distress increased her own. Pressing both her hands fervently in his, he conjured her to let the affecting intelligence of the event he dreaded come from herself, and begged, in the name of a brother, that she would inform him of her own removal and future

END OF VOL. IV.